

Rethinking Coaching: Transformative Professional Development

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Although the strengths and successes of the majority of public schools must not be overlooked, there are certainly many improvements that could be made in the ways students in the United States are educated, particularly for students from minority and low socio-economic backgrounds. Overall, 8.0 percent of students drop out of U.S. schools before finishing. That number grows to 9.9 percent when looking at only African American students and 18.3 percent for Hispanic students. Additionally, there is a persistent gap on NAEP literacy achievement test scores between White students and their African-American and Hispanic counterparts (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009). In addition to their academic purposes, schools are also sites where democratic institutions and practices are learned (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). In fact, many schools explicitly espouse civil preparation for democratic participation in their mission statements. This democratic goal does not supersede the importance of literacy and academic learning; rather, both are important roles to which schools aspire. Indeed, a democratic school should promote equality of opportunity for all of its students. In fact, many scholars claim that literacy, democracy, and social justice are inextricably intertwined (Banks, 2004; Giroux, 1992). Yet, any effort to close the academic achievement gap will fail until the relationships between such disenfranchised students and their schools change (Cummins, 2001).

The roles of teachers are essential to both promoting democratic schools (Sirotnik, 1990) and improving academic importance (Darling-Hammond, 1997). Of course, definitions and understandings of what it means to promote democracy in schools vary widely (Westheimer &

Kahne, 2004). One common approach to promoting democracy in schools, deliberative democracy, focuses on building understanding, consensus, participation, and dialogue among the various stakeholders involved with schools. Although the communicative focus of deliberative democracy may not be solely sufficient in creating more democratic schools, it is an important first step in that process (Apple, 2008; Bean, 1995). Regardless of definitions of democracy or understandings about how to improve student achievement; the continuing education of teachers, or professional development, is an essential part of improving schools and instruction (Guskey, 2002).

Professional development for teachers has become a ubiquitous characteristic of schools in the United States and a hot topic for debate. In recent volumes of *Educational Researcher*, two divergent views of the role of professional development were expounded. One view espoused the creation of a professional development library of videos indexed to the Common Core State Standards that would provide examples of and standardize “best practices” for instruction (Bausmith & Barry, 2011). In response to this proposal, Anderson and Herr (2011) advocate for professional development that is focused on local and authentic inquiry conducted by school-based professional learning communities. They argue that professional learning that is guided by authentic teacher inquiry is more likely to produce solutions to local problems and “re-culture” notions of schools and learning to be focused on inquiry (p. 287).

With the advent of No Child Left Behind, greater emphasis has been given to the professional development of teachers. The act mandates that both teachers and administration be provided with “intensive professional development” that is aligned with “state student academic achievement standards” (NCLB, Sec. 2113.c.2). Although few would argue that teachers do not need opportunities for professional development, traditional forms of professional development



are quite often ineffective in changing teacher practice (Sykes, 1996; Borko, 2004; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Little, 1993). The traditional professional development for teachers generally consists of a workshop, ranging anywhere from one hour to several days in length, where teachers listen to a speaker relate the latest research, program, or theory related to literacy instruction. Many times, these workshops are removed from the school setting where the teachers work. There are often few opportunities for discussion, fewer for practice and implementation, and follow-up is even less rare (Hughes, Cash, Ahwee, & Klingner, 2002). As such, traditional professional development becomes a singular, decontextualized event that has little impact on the beliefs, attitudes, or practices of teachers (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001).

Fullan (2001) proposes that in order to create lasting and impactful educational change, teachers must embrace a new kind of professionalism. Fullan describes this new professionalism as, “collaborative, not autonomous; open rather than closed; outward-looking rather than insular; and authoritative but not controlling” (p. 265). Professional development must be communal and embedded in the local context, with a focus on trying new approaches, refinement of practice and a steady supply of feedback. Fullan argues that such professional development cannot be contained and distributed in packaged programs and brief workshops. Without a new professionalism and a “reculturing” of teaching and teachers into “purposeful learning communities” (p. 136), Fullan argues that any gains in student achievement will be short-term and superficial.

In addition to Fullan, other scholars have suggested characteristics that a literacy professional should emulate. The end goal for professional development should not be merely a reading teacher with declarative and practical knowledge about reading processes and practices,

but also a teacher with a strong sense of professional judgment who can make and enact decisions in a highly localized setting (Roskos, Risko, Vukelich, 1998). This capacity for professional judgment allows teachers to use their literacy knowledge to make meaningful decisions based upon the specific and contextual needs of their students. In addition to professional judgment, teachers need to be able to critically reflect on their teaching practices within the “moral, political, and ethical contexts” of their schools to promote social justice and equity (Howard, 2003, p. 197), including being able to identify obstacles that may preventing social justice or equity. This means that students benefit not only from a skilled and knowledgeable teacher, but also a teacher with attributes and approaches that value the social, political, and emotional contexts in which they teach. A third part of this heightened form of professionalism encourages teachers to become researchers and produce local knowledge about teaching. The objects of their research can include their own teaching practices, classrooms, students, and contexts. As teacher researchers, teachers are empowered to take charge of their own professional learning, become more reflective, and more astute consumers of the research of others (Fullerton & Quinn, 2002, Downhower, Melvin, Sizemore, 1990).

In the end, one of the purposes of professional development ties into the persistent gap that many students experience. Addressing the needs of all students who live in this changing and dynamic world requires a level of teacher professionalism that encompasses knowledge, skills and attributes. In particular, the need to develop teachers who can produce change from within schooling systems, relying on observation, inquiry, and reflection, is a sustainable way to ensure that the students of tomorrow will be taught by adept and adaptable professionals whose purposeful practice meets their needs for preparation, creativity, curiosity and resilience.

## **Objectives of the Study**

The objective of this study is to explore the challenges and opportunities inherent in professional development, particularly in the form of literacy coaching. Although literacy coaching has been shown to be an effective tool for changing the academic practices of teachers, this study will also look at the contextual, individual, political, and value factors that surround professional development and coaching in a school setting. In particular, this study will explore how a coach might encourage the continuing education of teachers and to engage in transformative learning. Overall, the original aim of this study is to explore how a literacy coach might support professional learning that is transformative, sustainable and meets the needs of teachers.

## **Structure of the Dissertation**

This dissertation consists of several parts. In Chapter 2, is a review of the literacy coaching literature with a focus on both what is understood about the impacts of coaching and what are the theoretical possibilities of coaching. This review will also provide the theoretical framework that shapes the study. In Chapter 3 is a detailed explanation of the methods and analysis employed in this study. The participants and site, methods, data collection, and data analysis, are included. Chapter 4 contains the results of this study, while Chapter 5 discusses the results and places them within the context of the extant literature.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### Defining Coaching

Coaching is one method of professional development that embodies many of the characteristics and principles of effective professional development. Precise coaching definitions vary greatly, but it is generally defined as a job-embedded strategy for supporting the professional development of educators, which may involve teachers with research, theory, demonstrations, opportunities for practice, and feedback (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Coaching can address several shortcomings of the traditional workshop. Instead of a workshop in a removed setting, coaching generally takes place in the context of the classroom of the practicing teacher. Rather than teachers passively listening to a presenter, a coach works one-on-one with the teacher, building a relationship, and addressing the individual needs of the teacher. In contrast to the singular nature of workshops, coaching tends to be more long-term, with opportunities for follow-up and practice. Ultimately, the goal of coaching is to build capacity at schools. Recognizing that the coach may not be a permanent fixture at a school, the coach needs to focus on “generative processes that help teachers and principals learn to pursue school improvement themselves” (Blachowicz, Obrochta, Fogelberg, 2005, p. 56; Neufeld & Roper, 2003).

Moran (2007) suggests three principles that a coaching program should embody. First, coaching should encourage a school culture that values collaboration. Second, coaching should help both individuals and groups grow in their capacity to reflect and solve problems creatively. Finally, coaching should provide opportunities and support to educational professionals in the form of new knowledge, skills, and strategies for teaching. These principles of coaching offer a sharp contrast from traditional forms of professional development such as workshops.

In a review of the role of literacy coaches in secondary schools, Sturtevant (2003) identifies several tasks that a literacy coach might do. These include leading literacy teams on a school level, guiding teachers in appropriate literacy strategies, being a liaison between administrators and teachers, and being a local expert in literacy instruction. These expectations and roles of literacy coaches are in constant flux, with little agreement on precise definitions of the roles of a literacy coach (Mraz, Algozzine, & Watson, 2008).

Not only are the defined roles of coaches often shifting; there is little agreement in schools between principals, teachers, and coaches on exactly what the role of coaching should be (Mraz, Algozzine, & Watson, 2008). In interviewing eight literacy coaches, the teachers who worked with the coaches, and the principals of their schools, researchers found wide discrepancies in understandings about the role of coaches. In particular, teachers and coaches felt that the primary role of the coaches should be supporting teachers, modeling instructional practices, coordinating with parents, working with students and coordinating the school reading program. Although principals agreed that these roles were important, they felt more strongly that coaches should be administrators and focus on assessment of student learning and teacher performance. Principals did not feel that the coaches should be working directly with students. In sum, the definition and role of a coach are ill-defined, leaving a space for theory to guide understanding of the transformative possibilities of coaching.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Habermas – communicative action, constitutive knowledge**

Powerful theory is required to inform professional development that helps a teacher become critically reflective, democratic, and effective professionals. At its core, professional development and teacher coaching are aspects of adult education and can therefore be informed

by the theoretical work of the field of adult education. As such, Jack Mezirow's theories around adult learning yield helpful understandings of the unique needs of adult learners, and how they learn and change. Mezirow based his theories of adult learning on Jürgen Habermas' theories of communicative action. Habermas focuses more heavily on the theoretical aspects of learning, while Mezirow provides a more grounded approach to adult learning of Habermas' theories.

Habermas begins his theories of how people learn and change with the idea that discourse and communication are essential to democracy and civil society. Habermas' conception of democracy is known for resisting the Marxian location of democracy in labor and work, and instead for locating democracy within communication (Habermas, 1984). Brookfield, in relating Habermas' ideas of democracy to adult education, states "democracy resides in adults' capacity to learn, in particular, to learn how to resist the decline in social solidarity by recognizing and expanding the democratic processes inherent in human communication" (Brookfield, 2005, p. 1147.) As such, places of learning such as schools become sites where democracy may be encouraged through communication, but may also be equally discouraged through coercion and the communicative isolation of learners. Brookfield's understanding of Habermas' democratic communication centers on the theory of communicative action.

### *Communicative action.*

Habermas (1984) offers four different models of actions from communication. A certain communication may be focused on teleological action, where a speaker is attempting to make somebody do something. Normative actions are communications focused on the replication of cultural values and norms. Dramaturgical actions are centered on self-expression. The final model of action, communicative action, focuses on reaching mutual understanding between communicative partners.

There are a couple of assumptions that accompany communicative action. The theory of communicative action rests upon Habermas' assumption that communication is oriented towards reaching understanding. This means that, when engaged in communicative action, the participants are both sincerely trying to understand and learn from the other person. Habermas defines communicative action as taking place whenever "the actions of the agents involved are coordinated not through egocentric calculations of success but through acts of reaching understanding" (Habermas, 1984, p. 286). In communicative action, speakers are less motivated by their own agendas; rather they pursue goals "under the condition that they can harmonize their plans of action on the basis of common situation definitions" (p. 286).

Habermas identifies several conditions for communicative action to occur. First, the participants in the discussion must not be coerced or forced into the conversation or into agreement. That is, participants must be engaged in the communication free from external demands which seek to manage the participants. Second, participants in the communicative action must be honest in their reasoning of their actions. This is related to the first condition in that the participants in the communication are not promoting hidden agendas, which could be seen as coercive of the outcome. Finally, the participants must be in agreement as to the outcome of the discussion. In other words, all the participants in the communication must have some agreed upon sense about what happened in the conversation. This does not mean that the participants have to come to consensus; they simply must have agreement that the outcome of the discussion was accurate (Habermas, 1984; Brookfield, 2005).

In considering adult education in light of Habermas' theory of communicative action, several characteristics must be present in order to produce spaces for democracy in adult learning. Many of these characteristics mirror the characteristics of effective professional

development. First, adults must be able to guide their own learning and make essential decisions about that learning process, which centers on communication. Adults must also feel that their partners in communication are being truthful and integrous, both in their communication and in their intentions. The relationship between adults, whether their role is learners or teachers, is a determining characteristic. This can be difficult if a participant is engaging in the communication on the behalf of someone else's agenda. Finally, the adults must be able to agree upon what happened in the communication, or the learning. The interests of the participants drive the content of what is communicated or learned, according to Habermas. Habermas identifies three basic interests – constitutive interests—that may drive the communicative action.

### *Constitutive interests.*

In Habermas' (1971) mind, knowledge does not appear in a vacuum. Instead, it is the result of human action motivated by natural needs and interests. He refers to these interests as knowledge-constitutive interests. In other words, humans create knowledge to fill their needs. These knowledge-constitutive interests become an important conceptual tool to think about the communication that is happening in communicative action. Habermas identifies three kinds of knowledge-constitutive interests.

The first of the constitutive interests, which Habermas calls technical interests, are focused on causal explanations of the material world, and often center on one's work. These interests tend to be the force behind process-product research. When it comes to education, technical interests treat teaching as a craft, where teachers engage in specific practices that will produce an expected outcome. From this kind of interest, researchers need to improve education simply by finding better techniques and skills that will result in better education. This interest



alone is insufficient to account for the world because it does not account for any other views of knowing (Habermas, 1971; Ewert, 1991).

Practical interests, on the other hand, are more interpretive and are driven by needs for understanding and sociality. These interests focus more on human relations. Interpretive research that focuses on human sociality is often inspired by practical interests. In education, this research focuses on the reasoning behind the actions of teachers and students, relationships, culture, and the process of making meaning. Practical interest alone tends to be too dependent on the subjective understanding of those involved (Habermas, 1971; Ewert, 1991).

Emancipatory interests, which often come through reflection, are focused on issues of power. These interests do not reject the practical or the technical interests; rather, emancipatory interests see them as incomplete in their ability to create the conditions necessary to fulfill human potential. Critical sciences, which focus on critiquing issues of power, inequity, and justice, come from emancipatory interests. (Habermas, 1971; Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Ewert, 1991). Communicative action may occur with any of these constitutive interests, provided that it meets the conditions required for it.

### **Habermas and Mezirow**

Building upon Habermas' theoretical work, Jack Mezirow offers a "comprehensive, idealized, and universal model" of adult learning known as transformation theory or transformative learning (Mezirow, 1994, p. 222). Based upon empirical work, Mezirow identifies ten phases an adult experiences as part of transformative learning. The beginning phase is marked by a dilemma that the learner finds disorienting, which is followed by self-examination and a critical assessment of assumptions. Recognizing that other learners have also gone through and negotiated this dilemma is followed by an exploration of options for new roles, relationships,

and actions. The learner then plans a course of action, which involves acquiring new skills and knowledge, and the learner begins to try on the new roles. Finally, the adult learner builds competence in the new roles and reintegrates them into his or her own life (Mezirow, 1991, p. 168-169). In later formulations of transformational learning, it is noted that this process is “individualistic, fluid, and recursive,” (Taylor, 2000, p. 292.), and the initial dilemma is not necessarily a single event, but could be a string of events or processes (Taylor, 2000; Baumgartner, 2001).

It is important to distinguish between informative learning and transformative learning. Informative learning is the process of deepening and adding to understanding and knowledge in an already extant frame of reference. Transformative learning changes and/or increases the capacity of the original frame of reference (Kegan, 2000). This kind of learning is valuable, and is an essential element to adult learning. Transformative learning, on the other hand, is less about *what* a person comes to know, and more about *how* a person comes to know.

For Mezirow’s model of transformative learning to occur, certain conditions must be met to the extent at which it is possible. Primarily, echoing Habermas theory of communicative action, adults must be in situations where “full, free participation in reflective discourse” is the norm (Mezirow, 1991, p. 7). For this to take place, adults must:

- Have accurate and complete information
- Be free from coercion and self-deception
- Have the ability to weigh evidence and evaluate arguments
- Have the ability to be critically reflective
- Be open to alternative perspectives
- Have equality of opportunity to participate, and

- Be willing to accept an informed, objective, and rational consensus as a legitimate test of validity. (Mezirow, 1991, p. 198).

Although it may be unreasonable to expect all of these conditions to simultaneously exist in a perfect state, they provide a lodestone that may yield in more optimal communicative contexts. These conditions for transformative learning are mirrored in the literature on effective professional development.

Habermas' theories have been justly critiqued as insufficiently critical of the role of power and the nature of truth (Pennycook, 2001), yet his theory of communicative action provides important affordances to the understanding of literacy coaching and professional development. Pennycook states that a fourth post-modern and post-structural category of constitutive knowledge should be added (p. 42) that addresses the political nature of knowledge, language, and education. Furthermore, Pennycook is dubious about making claims of truth, questioning whether such a truth is knowable, particularly as the participants in the communication cannot truly have full and complete understanding of the other person. Pennycook certainly offers a valid critique of Habermas, one that lends an important insight into this study. Although Habermas proposes that truth claims are an important aspect in communicative action, these truth claims should not be considered necessarily completely understood between the participants in the communication. This circumvents the understanding of truth into something that is more of an individual perception of what is most true in that particular moment.

Neither, as argues Pennycook, could anyone ever be completely free from the power of outsiders. As such, it is important to recognize that Habermas' theory of communicative action relies less upon definite understandings and statements, and more upon perceptions and

understandings which the participants reach to the best of their ability. However, as a researcher and as a coach, this provides an infinitely liminal space where the participants and I may create meaning endlessly.

Yet for teachers who are interested in reforming their instruction; this fourth category may be a step that comes after they have developed a promising and self-extending form of professional development. It is possible, in fact, that beginning with an empowering form of professional development will prepare teachers to become more aware, critical, and responsive to the important issues surrounding power, literacy, and education. Habermas' theories, as effectualized by Mezirow, provide a clear and consistent path for professional development and teacher change.

### **Habermas, Mezirow and coaching**

There are several reasons why the theories and concepts developed by Habermas and Mezirow are helpful in thinking about teacher coaching and professional development. Although there are many different models of teacher coaching, the relationship between the coach and the teacher is a hallmark of all of them (L'Allier, Elish-Piper, & Bean, 2010). Communication between the coach and the teacher are essential, and this relationship often is the determining factor in a successful coaching experience (Costa & Garmston, 1984). In coaching, the purpose of this relationship and the concomitant communication is to raise questions and to discuss and plan actions for the improvement of instruction in the classroom. In essence, it moves beyond a mere discussion and into an active realm. As such, using communicative action as a guidepost in examining the communication in this relationship creates an opportunity for critique and assessment of the communication and actions.

It is conceivable that in a coaching experience, all three of Habermas' knowledge-constitutive interests may be observed. Technical interests may appear as the coach advises the teacher on specific lesson plans, strategies, programs or approaches that a teacher could use to address a specific problem. Practical interests might be evident as the coach and the teacher engage in discussions to find understanding in what is taking place in the classroom as well as in school relationships and culture. Emancipatory interests may be served as the coach and the teacher reflect on and question their experiences and the broader social systems which delimit the lives of students and the instruction in schools.

If schools are going to transform in order to better serve the current student body, then the professional development provided to teachers should also be transformative. For it to be transformative, it requires reflection on premises, assumptions and expectations (Cranton, 1996; Mezirow, 1991). It also needs to be contextualized in the school setting as well as directed by teachers to meet their own individual needs (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Coaching may be an effective form of transformative professional development.

### **Literature Review Questions**

The underlying impetus for coaching is to create changes in teaching that will improve student learning. This change comes about in many ways, and should be examined in the light of educational theory. As a form of professional development, a review of the literature about coaching should consider current understandings of effective professional development as well as the specific needs of adult learners. This review seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How does coaching change and transform teachers and teaching?
2. What is the potential of coaching to change and transform teachers and teaching?

The words *change* and *transform* are used purposefully in the questions. Certainly any form of professional development or any experience may effect a change in a school. However, following Kegan's (2000) interpretation of transformation in Mezirow's transformative learning, it is also of interest if and how coaching can effect transformation. The difference between change and transformation is not necessarily of scale, but in how a person knows and makes meaning of their experiences. New learning may add to understanding resulting in change, but transformation is the result of a change in capacity and structure.

This review will look at two bodies of literature in order to answer these questions. The first question is answered through an examination of the empirical studies that have looked at literacy coaching. Mezirow's theory of transformational learning is used to examine this body of literature. Additionally, Habermas' related constitutive knowledges will be used as an organizational framework and lens to understand this work.

The second question is more of a theoretical question. Coaching is a relatively young and under researched form of professional development. Many of the claims made in the literature written for practitioners have not been studied empirically. As such, to understand the potential of coaching, a review of the practitioner and theoretical literatures is necessary. The primary question in this literature review applies Habermas' knowledge constitutive interests to the coaching literature.

### **Literature Review Methodology**

Although coaching has appeared in many professions, I chose to limit the literature in this review to literacy coaching done in schools. Recognizing that one of the essential characteristics of coaching is its situated nature in schools, I omitted studies that focused on the pre-service education of teachers. As a field, education and educators must think about not only the content

of their teaching, but also pedagogy and the pedagogy that is particular to the content (Shulman, 1987). It could be argued that the coaching done in other fields might offer important insights into the ways that coaching is implemented; however, the distinct needs and contexts of educators limit the applicability of research done in other professions.

I conducted literature searches using the words *literacy coach* and *reading coach* as well as the variations on those words. Searches were conducted via Wilson Web, ERIC, and GoogleScholar. While reading through the literacy coaching studies, I focused on the studies that described any kind of change in schools, as well as those that offered conceptual and theoretical understandings of coaching. This meant that some studies that merely described the work of coaching, such as those that documented how a coach used their time, were not included in this review. While reading the studies that focused on change, I noted the sources of the coaching models used by the studies. These were then used to further inform the theoretical and conceptual review of literacy coaching.

## **Literature Review Results**

This review begins with an examination of the different coaching models found in the literature. Communicative action and transformative learning will provide the theoretical lens for thinking about the coaching models. Following the review of coaching models, the review looks at empirical studies done on coaching. Habermas' constitutive knowledge framework will provide the structure for examining the empirical work.

### **Conceptual review of coaching**

The amount of literature on coaching is rapidly expanding. Much of this literature consists of guidebooks and conceptual work intended for districts and coaches. This part of the literacy coaching literature is essential to understand in that it provides descriptions and

hypothesis about the potential of coaching to create transformative change in schools. It provides both short-term advice and long-term vision for coaching. However, much of this literature contains differing views and models of coaching.

Accompanying the expansion in the amount of literature on literacy coaching is a number of pieces that attempt to categorize and simplify an understanding of coaching. For example, in their recent manual on literacy coaching, McKenna and Walpole (2008) define six different models of coaching, based upon the type of interactions between coaches and teachers. Deussen, Coskie, Robinson, and Autio (2007) define five models of coaching found in Reading First programs, differentiated by how and with whom the coaches spend their time. Neufeld and Roper (2003) divide coaches into two groups: content coaches, who work with teachers in improving instruction, and change coaches, who work on a school-wide level and with administrators. In exploring the different variables used to categorize coaching, a broader construction of coaching models variation may be seen.

Despite the large number of divisions and types of literacy coaches, many of the coaching models may be grouped by common characteristics into broader coaching models. In McKenna and Walpole's (2008) six categories of coaching models, they distinguish coaching models by how *intrusive* the coaches' work is on the practices of the teacher. The coach offering suggestions and examples of how to improve teacher practice characterizes less intrusive models, including the mentoring of new teachers, cognitive coaching, and peer coaching. The more intrusive models, such as subject-specific coaching, program-specific coaching, and reform oriented coaching, use coaching to demand more specific changes in a teacher's practice. McKenna and Walpole place these different coaching models along a "hardness scale." The soft end of the scale is for coaching models they describe as "invitational, tactful, non-



confrontational” with “multiple views of good teaching” which honors teacher expertise. The hard end of the scale is marked as “insistent, blunt, confrontational when necessary” with a “singular view of good teaching” which challenges a teacher’s expertise (McKenna & Walpole, 2008, p. 14).

Also focusing on *intrusiveness* and adding *intensity*, Moran’s (2007) literacy coaching continuum orders coaching models that provide less intensive and intrusive supports, while depicted at the other end are more intrusive and intensive supports. For example, the less intrusive supports are anchored by collaborative resource management, in which a coach assists the teacher in finding resources that align to the teacher’s curricular purposes. This is followed on the continuum by literacy content presentations, focused classroom visits, and co-planning, where the coach and the teacher together plan lessons that the teacher will implement in the classroom. At the other end of the spectrum lays co-teaching, preceded by peer coaching, demonstration lessons, and study groups. These coaching supports require more invasive activities than the activities on the other end of the spectrum. These two continua offer an important lens into the nature of coaching. A coach may provide intense and intrusive support that takes over some of the instructional duties of a teacher, or a coach may serve merely as a source for resources and suggestions.

In a study conducted by Veenman and Denessen (2001) on the impact of professional training of coaches, the authors describe two models of coaching methods. They describe coaching where the teacher initiates the professional development to augment his or her own professional agenda as *consulting* coaching. When the coach is the both initiator of the coaching experience and the definer of the specific coaching agenda and desired outcome, the authors describe it as *confrontational* coaching. This binary, which emphasizes the power relationships

between the coach and the teacher, is also reflected by Ippolito (2010) who sets up a *directive/responsive* continuum for coaching models. Directive coaching is managed by the coach, who determines what the agenda of the coaching will be, while responsive coaching employs a more collaborative agenda creation between the coach and the teacher. As such, responsive coaching honors the teacher's expertise in education, while directive coaching implies that the teacher's expertise in teaching is deficient.

One important characteristic of all of these coaching continua is the role of the coach in setting the agenda of the professional development experience. Whether it is described as more intensive, intrusive, hard, directive, or confrontational, some coaching models are directed by someone other than the teacher. In these cases, the content of what is to be coached, as well as the coaching activities are devised by someone who is not necessarily present in the classroom. The original content coaching model, designed by Joyce and Showers (1980) is characterized more by the directive and intrusive kinds of coaching activities. At the other end of the spectrum, coaching may be described as invitational, responsive, collaborative, soft, and consulting. In such models, the teacher is empowered to drive the coaching agenda. Costa and Garmston (1994) created a model of coaching that reflects this end of the spectrum, called cognitive coaching. These two paradigmatic models serve as useful anchors to describe this coaching continuum. In the following sections I will take a deeper look at these coaching models, using Habermas' and Mezirow's theories of adult learning as a lens.

### ***Content coaching***

The majority of literacy coaching models cites the content coaching model as their point of reference. This kind of coaching focuses on assisting teachers in the implementation of specific programs and practices. The name of the model in studies may vary, or it may simple be

referred to as coaching, but a close examination of the literacy coaching used in such studies reveals the coaching agenda is to transfer a specific content, skill, or instructional model from the coach to the teacher. In many studies, the specific content, skill, or program to implement provides researchers with a measure of fidelity of treatment for coaching. In this section, the origins of content coaching in educational settings will be explored, as well as several variations of this original coaching model.

### Joyce and Showers

The earliest references to coaching teachers in academic settings come from Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers in 1980. Almost in passing, the pair recommended coaching as a component of improved professional training for in-service teachers. They advocated “coaching for application” of the skills or models being taught in traditional professional development settings (Joyce & Showers, 1980, p. 380). Their original treatment of coaching is brief, with an emphasis on modeling instructional skills, providing feedback to teachers, and helping teachers in their application of such skills to their classrooms. The pair expanded the coaching model in later years, proposing that when effective coaching is implemented, “most (probably nearly all) teachers will begin to transfer the new model into their active repertoire” (Joyce & Showers, 1982, p. 5). Joyce and Showers identify the transfer of new skills and models of teaching as the primary problem of teachers, and offer coaching as an “attack” against that problem (p. 5). In their model of coaching, the coach was to provide five things to the teacher to assist in the transfer of new skills. The coach should: provide companionship to the teacher, supply technical feedback on teaching, give analysis of the application of the target skills, help the teacher adapt the skills to students, and support the teacher’s personal facilitation as they struggle with adaptation. In this model of professional development, Joyce and Showers suggest that teachers,

as well as school administrators, college professors, and curriculum supervisors, should be coaches for each other. Finally, they draw a parallel between the teacher coaching that they are recommending and athletic coaching, again reinforcing the emphasis on skill development. Finally, they interview an athletic coach to learn how training and transfer are handled in athletics, and draw the conclusion that teacher training should be done similarly.

The focus on the training and transfer of educational skills found in Joyce and Shower's content coaching model has found its way into much of the conceptual literature on coaching, particularly when coaching is linked to a specific subject area, such as literacy, or a specific instructional program. Whether coaches are described more broadly as literacy coaches or as coaches of a specific skill such as guided reading (Hasbrouk & Denton, 2005), the emphasis of content coaching is on the transfer of skills and practices from the coach to the teacher. As such, the content area coaches are often trained in the coaching model, but are chosen for their expertise and experience in the targeted subject matter. For literacy coaches, this expertise frequently includes advanced degrees in the content area, such as reading specializations, or masters' degrees in literacy (Deussen, Coskie, Robinson, & Autio, 2007; Bean, Swan, & Knaub, 2003). In most of the content coaching studies reviewed, the coaches were chosen, at least partially, for their expertise in the content matter.

One variation on content coaching is to employ the coach to work on a more general area of instruction, without a specific program or skill to teach. In these situations, the content to be coached is still chosen by someone outside of the coaching relationship, but the prescriptiveness and regimentation of the expectations are somewhat less. Examples include coaching content literacy (Cantrell & Hughes, 2008), improving reading and writing instruction (Steckel, 2009; Hasbrouk & Denton, 2005), and early literacy instruction (Neuman & Cunningham, 2009).

Although the coaches were specific to a general subject, teachers and coaches had more leeway to co-construct what the exact coaching agenda would be. The lack of a specific program of instruction lessens the prescriptive nature of such coaching.

Another variation on the content coaching model is to include an emphasis on adapting the content to the students (Hasbrouk & Denton, 2007). Examples include models where coaches helped teachers adapt their instruction to special needs students in a general education classroom (Gersten, Morvant, & Brengelman, 1995), helped teachers become more adaptive to their learners' needs in a science classroom (Vogt & Rogalla, 2009), or coaching reading teachers in using student data to guide reading interventions (Denton, Swanson & Mathes, 2007). These studies use student data, or knowledge about specific student characteristics, to help the coach guide the teacher in making instructional decisions that are more beneficial to all students.

A more recent iteration of the content coaching model may be found in Burkins' (2007) *Coaching for Balance*. In this guide for literacy coaches, Burkins recognizes that a coach may have been hired to implement a specific literacy program, and most of her instruction to coaches focuses on implementing specific literacy practices. Yet, Burkins takes implementation of a literacy program a step further in extolling coaches to extend beyond the program and focus on "deep literacy learning" (p. 103), which she hierarchically describes as: 1) management of materials, time, and students, 2) reading theory and pedagogy, 3) instructional competence, and 4) reflection (p. 105). This represents a shift beyond simply having literacy coaches focus on program implementation to helping teachers become broad experts in the field. As such, Burkins states her belief that one of the driving forces behind coaching should be a desire to serve teachers (p.195).

Recognizing that a prescriptive, fidelity of treatment view of professional development is in conflict with the differentiated needs of school, particularly urban schools, Blachowicz et al. (2010) encourages schools and coaches to take a more formative approach. This entails collaboration between teachers and coaches about goals and implementation, followed by evaluation of the goals and implementation. Echoing this concern over prescriptive coaching, L’Allier, Elish-Piper, and Bean (2010) state that literacy coaches must have “specialized knowledge that goes beyond just knowing how to teach reading well; they must also understand how to work effectively with adults” (p. 552). The programmatic and skill foci of content coaching models certainly are important for teachers, however, for wider and sustainable transformation of literacy instruction and schools, there is much more that a literacy coach could address.

### ***Cognitive coaching***

Many of the variations on the original coaching model consisted of minor adjustments, but cognitive coaching, sometimes called reflective coaching, as designed by Costa and Garmston (1994) is exceptionally different. Rather than the coaching focus being on the transfer of the coach’s content expertise to the teacher, cognitive coaching does not focus on a specific content area or practice. The aim of a cognitive coach is to assist the teacher in becoming more reflective and inquisitive about their classrooms, with the teacher ultimately arriving at a state of “holonomy” (p. 4). This state of holonomy occurs when the teacher consistently engages in reflection and inquiry without the assistance of the coach. Cognitive coaching utilizes many of the same techniques found in content coaching, but with less emphasis on the modeling aspect of content coaching. Because there is no specific content area in cognitive coaching, the coaches are not necessarily experts in any one content area, and typically would not have anything to model.

In cognitive coaching, the coaching cycle becomes central. The coaching cycle consists of three phases. In the first phase, the coach and the teacher meet to discuss the teacher's practice and to plan an upcoming lesson. The coach's role in this phase is to help the teacher reflect on their lesson planning, foresee potential problems in the upcoming lesson, and ask critical questions. The coach and the teacher also discuss the specific phenomena that the coach should focus on while observing the planned lesson, oftentimes devising a data collection instrument to record observations of that phenomenon. In the second phase of the coaching cycle, the coach observes the planned lesson, and engages in data collection on the specific phenomena on which the coach and the teacher agreed. In the third phase of the coaching cycle, the teacher and the coach meet to discuss and reflect on the observed lesson and the data collected by the coach. The coach and the teacher also make plans for further action at this point.

Although there is room for much variance in coaching, an idealized example of cognitive coaching in a school setting might go like so: A third grade teacher is worried because a handful of boys are consistently off-task and failing to complete in-class assignments. The teacher sets up a time to consult with the literacy coach to address this problem. After briefly discussing the problem, they set up an observation where the coach will observe the boys and the teacher. In the observation, the coach notes that the boys are mostly off-task when the class is working on an assignment, and that the boys usually begin the assignment but devolve into off-task behavior part way through. The coach asks the teacher about the literacy strengths and needs of the boys, to which the teacher admits that he is unsure about their reading. The coach and the teacher decide to conduct a small research project into the literacy needs of these boys. The coach pulls together a few readings from research, and the teacher begins to conduct small group reading sessions with the boys. The coach engages the teacher in the coaching cycle, and helps plan these

sessions, observes them, and reflects with the teacher on their observations. As this cycle continues, the teacher is able to adjust his instructional approach to working with the boys so that the boys are experiencing more success and growth in the classroom. Importantly, the teacher is more confident in his literacy instructional skills and is beginning to create a self-extending research approach to addressing future classroom needs, eventually not needing the coach.

With the absence of a specific content area or practice to be coached, the process of creating a cognitive coaching agenda differs from content coaching. Coaches and teachers are expected to co-construct the coaching agenda, allowing the teacher greater autonomy in choosing the focus of the coaching. In the coaching cycle, this takes place in the first meeting as the coach and the teacher discuss the upcoming observation. The coach is to ask the teacher what they would like the coach to observe. According to the model, this relieves the teacher of the stress of having everything in their instruction being observed as well as it honors the expertise of the teacher to problem solve and plan appropriate instruction for the class (Costa & Garmston, 1994; McLymont & Costa, 1998). In cognitive coaching, rather than an expertise in a content area, the expertise of the coach is on being a collaborator through the coaching process, asking questions, and helping the teacher to engage in self-reflection and critique. As such, cognitive coaching tends to take a long-term, sustainable approach to professional development in that it focuses on developing inquiry-minded and self-reflective teachers (Peterson, Taylor, Burnham, Schock, 2009).

### Variations

The variations on cognitive coaching are fewer than in content coaching. Evocative coaching, as described by Bob and Megan Tschannen-Moran (2010) uses the metaphor of a mobius strip to explain their vision of coaching. Around the first turn of the mobius strip, the no-



fault turn, coaches ask teachers to tell stories about their teaching and express empathy for what they are experiencing. The second turn, the strengths-building turn, the coaches focus the teachers on conducting inquiry into his or her teaching, and designing experiments around improving their teaching. Rather than the coach entering a classroom situation telling the teacher what needs to change, this model emphasizes and builds upon the teachers' strengths. Throughout the coaching experience, coaches build trust, connections, and teacher-consciousness of their practice. Although the coaching cycle may be part of evocative coaching, it is not a necessary or even a highlighted aspect of it. Instead, the teacher and the coach focus on "action-learning experiments" that are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound (p. 200). Like cognitive coaching, the teacher guides the inquiry process and co-creates the coaching agenda with the coach. "Asking teachers what and how they want to learn, rather than telling them what to do, enables teachers to discover and design that learning for themselves through observation and exploration" (p. 23). As in cognitive coaching, this model emphasizes the sustainable aspect of coaching in that the end result is teachers who guide their own inquiries into education.

Another variation on the cognitive coaching approach, responsive coaching (Dozier, 2006), views literacy coaches not as experts, rather as knowledgeable others. Again, a respectful and caring relationship between the coach and the teacher that fronts continuous inquiry, professionalism, and problem solving is at the center of this model. Not made explicit in other models is the idea that coaching should build self-extending systems (Clay, 2001) that extends beyond the immediate coaching context into future contexts and situations. This is accomplished by setting up collaborative systems of problem solving and sustained learning through tools such as study groups, visiting colleague's classrooms, and sharing knowledge. Dozier offers a series

of tools (sharing experiences, examining student work, team-teaching lessons, study groups, etc.) which the literacy coach may use with teachers to create “sustained inquiry” and “critical thinking and inquiry” (Dozier, 2006, p. 4).

In Dozier’s view, it is important for coaches to choose words carefully. For example, coaches should avoid the word *training* because that implies a directive kind of learning that is not part of responsive coaching. Rather, coaches should be focused on the use of “professional judgment to make teaching decisions as [one] considers the learner, the context, and the task” (Dozier, 2006, p. 54). As such, the coach frames recommendations as “possibilities” rather than as “absolutes” (p. 142). Such linguistic staging underlies the belief that teachers are professionals who are capable of creating effective instruction within their localized contexts.

### ***Discussion of conceptual models***

Although the fidelity of treatment aspect of content coaching may be appealing to researchers and administrators interested in statistical measures of student and teacher learning, it is difficult to conceive how a prescriptive take on content coaching could lead to transformative changes. Conditions such as teacher control of their professional learning and being open to alternative methods are important aspects of transformative professional development and adult education. In a coaching situation where the coaches’ role is to enforce the implementation of a specific program or practice, these aspects of transformative professional development are absent or diminished.

It has been argued that a teacher who is struggling with his or her instruction may not be ready for the more fluid and responsive nature of cognitive coaching, and that such invitational coaching may be insufficiently “soft” in addressing pressing instructional needs (McKenna & Walpole, 2008, p. 14). In such cases, an approach to coaching that provides detailed guidance

may be most helpful to a struggling teacher. Unfortunately, questions regarding the timing of coaching in a teachers' professional life cycle and matching different models of professional development have not been answered. Conceivably, new teachers and struggling teachers may need a more didactic form of professional development such as content coaching; while more experienced teachers may benefit more from the independent nature of cognitive coaching. Yet, from the perspective of communicative action, effective professional development, and transformative learning, prescriptive and didactic professional development will not result in educators with sufficient professional judgment. Assuming that a coach will not always be present to direct teachers in their instruction, a sustainable model of coaching must help teachers develop the skills, attributes, and approaches that yield inquiry-minded and reflective educators who will continually engage in their own professional development.

### **Review of empirical work**

#### ***Technical interests***

Certainly, there are many possible ways that literacy coaching could create change in schools. In this section, the changes in a teacher's skills and abilities due to literacy coaching are the main focus. Such changes correspond with Habermas' *technical interest* category of knowledge that is linked to the human need to control or manipulate the human environment (Habermas, 1971). In applying Habermas to adult education and his theory of transformative learning, Mezirow (2000) refers to this kind of learning as instrumental learning. Much of the work of scientists and engineers fall into this category, as it tends to favor quantitative and experimental research. It is therefore unsurprising that many of the empirical studies of coaching also fit into Habermas' category of technical interests.

In several of these studies, researchers are measuring how well teachers implement a specific program, and how that program affects student outcomes. In the following seven studies, researchers have tried to understand the link between coaching, teacher implementation of specific interventions, and the impact of this on student achievement. These studies provide teachers with an intervention, whose impact is measured by the researchers. The specific skills in which teachers are trained, coupled by student performance data are the technical interests of the researchers.

In trying to determine the effects of coaching on teachers and students, several studies looked at change through teacher learning with various interventions. In an examination of an intervention, called PHAST PACES, to improve reading comprehension of high school students with reading disabilities, Lovett (2008) and colleagues started with a three-day workshop with teachers that emphasized understanding the theory behind their intervention, modeling the intervention, and giving opportunities for teachers to practice the intervention in small groups. After teachers were trained in the workshop, they received visits from coaches two to three times per semester. The coaches' responsibility was to create rapport with teachers, ensure that teachers are implementing the intervention as outlined by the researchers, model the intervention, and answer the teachers' questions. Teachers were also expected to attend additional workshops to review the intervention and to provide feedback to the researchers. Teachers reported that the PHAST PACES professional development increased their knowledge and awareness about working with students with reading problems as well as their confidence in their instructional abilities. Overall, when compared to students who did not have the intervention, students of the coached teachers scored higher on reading skill measures such as Woodcock Reading Mastery Test and a researcher designed measure. Additionally, the researchers found that the students of

coached teachers who were in their second year of using the intervention scored higher on measures of reading comprehension and in reading difficult words than students of teachers who were in their first year of the intervention (Lovett et al. 2008).

Along the same lines, when compared to a control group, the students of teachers who were coached had better learning outcomes as measured by the Adaptive Teaching Competency measure as well as larger achievement gains in scientific literacy (Vogt & Rogalla, 2009). In this study, teachers attended a two-day workshop on adaptive teaching, followed by nine coaching visits where the coaches' role was to reinforce the adaptive coaching instructional approach. In these visits, the coach and the teacher would meet to discuss an upcoming lesson, followed by the coach and the teacher team-teaching the lesson, ending with a post-lesson reflection. To measure the success of implementation of adaptive teaching, researchers used several techniques. Teachers were individually shown a video of a lesson where the teacher was using non-adaptive teaching. Teachers were told to stop the video when they observed non-adaptive teaching and suggest an alternative. Teachers were asked to respond to a vignette describing a situation where a teacher needed help planning a lesson to meet diverse student needs. Finally, the students of the teachers were given a scientific literacy test. In their study, the researchers found that coached teachers became more adept at planning for diverse student needs, yet showed little growth in implementing adaptive teaching. Students of the coached teachers showed greater gains on the test of scientific literacy. Although this study does not focus solely on literacy, the emphasis on coaching teachers to adapt their instruction to the needs of students provides strong evidence of the ability of coaching to help teachers make changes in their instruction that improve the learning outcomes of students (Vogt & Rogalla, 2009).

In an attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of professional development for the teachers of English Language Learners, Batt (2010) used both quantitative (tests, surveys) and qualitative (interviews, open-ended surveys, group meetings) to examine teacher implementation of the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) developed by Echevarria, Vogt, and Short (2004) in their classrooms. Teachers learned about the SIOP model and its instructional components at a summer institute, which they rated as effective professional development on a survey. Despite this, as well as a high level of commitment to the SIOP method, little more than half (53%) of the teachers reported implementing SIOP to a great extent in their classrooms on a likert scale. However, coaches had strong effect on implementation. When coaching was implemented to provide SIOP support to the teachers, implementation rates rise to 100% of teachers implementing SIOP to a great extent. In this study, coaches met with teachers to determine which SIOP elements would be observable by the coach. The coach would then use the SIOP protocol to “rate the level of the targeted components” (p. 1000) of SIOP, ending with a reflective post-lesson conference and written feedback focused on SIOP.

Using both DIBELS data and a standardized literacy test, Terra Nova, to measure student gains in literacy, researchers found that coaching teachers has a positive effect on student literacy learning. Biancarosa, Bryk, and Dexter (2010) implemented a four-year study of the effects of coaching on student literacy achievement. As part of the study, literacy coaches received a full year of professional development in coaching as well as in literacy theory and practice. Known as the Literacy Collaborative, teachers in this study received 40 hours of a professional development course, led by the literacy coach, in their first year as participants. This course focused on read-alouds, guided reading, shared reading, interactive writing, writing workshop and word study. In following years, they received 10 to 12 hours. The literacy coaches then

worked one-on-one with the teachers “observing, modeling, and catalyzing teachers' development toward more expert practice” (p. 10). They found that as these coaches for longer times coached teachers, the literacy gains of their students grew larger when compared to teachers who were not being coached.

Elish-Piper and L'Allier (2010) used weekly coaching logs and state student test score data to understand how five literacy coaches spent their time, what the coaches focused on, and the affect coaching has on reading achievement in kindergarten and first grade. They found that the coaches only spent about half of their time with teachers, during which they engaged in conferencing with the teachers, observing instruction, and modeling instruction. Although the authors insist that the small number of coaches in this study should cast some doubt on their findings, Elish-Piper and L'Allier found that the greatest reading achievement gains, according to the state test, were made in the classrooms where the coaches spent the majority of their time actually in the classroom, specifically where coaches spent that time in observations. They also found that significant differences in student gains could be attributed to differences among teachers. For example, they observe that on specific reading sub skill tests where teacher variance accounts for a large portion of student achievement, a coach could focus their attention on improving the instruction of those particular teachers whose students are low in such a sub skill. Thus, they theorize that on-going professional development and coaching is justified, and that it should target particular teachers.

In a randomized controlled study conducted by Powell, Diamond, Burchinal, and Koehler (2010), researchers compared the early literacy skills of children instructed by a teacher who had received coaching as part of an early literacy professional development program, with similar students taught by teachers who had not received the professional development. The coaching

was highly focused on development of oral language and phonemic awareness of the students. The researchers found that the students of the coached teachers showed more growth than the control groups on letter knowledge, blending skills, writing, and concepts about print. Additionally, this study found that student effects for teachers who were coached remotely via videotaped classroom sessions followed by written coach feedback were approximately the same as for teachers who were coached in situ.

In an effort to understand the effects of literacy coaching on reading comprehension instruction and achievement in schools marked by a highly mobile teaching staff, Matsumura, Garnier, Correnti, Junker, and Bickel (2010) found that an already established coaching program helped teachers who were new to the school improve student reading comprehension. This study employed Content-Focused Coaching to help teachers improve their reading comprehension instruction following the *Questioning the Author* guidelines (Buck & McKeown, 2006) for discussion of texts. As such, reading comprehensions scores, particularly for the ELL population, were higher than in similar schools without the coaching program. In fact, the reading achievement gains of ELL students in the schools with coached teachers began to approach that of their non-ELL classmates.

In another study, researchers noted that the effect of traditional professional development alone is negligible, but coaching resulted in significant improvements in language and literacy practices of early childhood educators (Neuman & Cunningham, 2009). They found that although literacy coaching had a positive impact on the literacy practices of the teachers; neither coaching nor coursework changed their declarative knowledge about literacy. They theorize that the job-embedded nature of coaching is what led to the change in teaching practice for these teachers. In this study, the researchers described their coaching model as “diagnostic or



prescriptive” in that the coaches’ responsibility was to provide “corrective feedback” on specific literacy practices that were identified as the most effective practices for preschool literacy (Neuman & Cunningham, 2009, p. 543). Contrastingly, the researchers also describe the coaching as reflective and not directive.

## Discussion

One of the characteristics in these studies is the attention focused on the material the coaches intended to transfer to the teachers. As such, the material becomes the coaching agenda. In some studies, the content was very specific, such as SIOP or a remedial reading program. In such cases, the coaching agenda was mandated by administrators, legislators, or researchers, and was accompanied by strict expectations and measures of teacher or student performance. This kind of coaching, when played out in schools, is characterized by coaches from outside the school implementing a scripted program of instruction on the teachers. Teachers and coaches were not involved in deciding what the coaching agenda would be. In other studies, the coaching agenda was more broadly defined as improved literacy instruction. In such situations, the coach and the teacher have more space to determine exactly what the coaching agenda should be. As reviewed earlier, an important aspect of adult learning is that adults need to be able to guide their own learning agenda. This enables adults to take ownership over their learning. As such, although these studies do imply a change in teacher practice accompanied by some good growth in academic achievement, it must be questioned as to the durability of such changes. Once the coaching intervention ends, what changes will endure? In the rapidly shifting contexts of a classroom, the ability of teachers to evaluate, adjust, and engage in their own teaching research may be a more valuable trait than coached fidelity to an intervention. What happens when the local contexts change and the intervention is no longer appropriate? It is questionable as to

whether teachers have developed professionally into more capable and thoughtful decision-makers and directors of their professional learning who engage in reflective examinations of their classrooms and instruction. Although such studies are intriguing for their scientific measures and outcomes, the long-term effects and broader contexts should also be considered.

These studies generally arrive at the same conclusions – that when coached, teachers are more likely to adopt a targeted instructional practice or set of practices, and students are likely to be impacted by that instructional practice. In her critique of current models of professional development, Little (2001) lumps coaching into other professional development programs that emphasize teacher training. Although improvements in practice gained through training should not be disregarded, fidelity to a prescribed literacy program is insufficient to create the radical changes necessary to create schools adept at both literacy and democracy. Indeed, coaching can be effective in training teachers. In fact, several authors of these studies recognize this limiting tension (Batt, 2010; Elish-Piper, L’Allier, 2010). If one of the desired outcomes of coaches is the development of metacognitive, adaptive, self-regulated, and contextualized professional educators, then prescriptive programs focused on discrete practices will not be sufficient (Lovett, et al., 2008; Vogt & Rogalla, 2009; Batt, 2010). For the technical knowledge findings that come from the studies that looked at literacy more broadly, other questions are left unanswered. Elish-Piper and L’Allier (2010) suggest that coaching may affect teachers in different phases of their career differently. This implies that the personal relationship between the coach and the teacher, as well as the contextualized needs of the teacher must be considered. In fact, what the technical findings are most weak at exploring is how the context affects the practice of the teacher, the coach, and the students. Certainly it should be expected that contextual factors would play an

important role in the success of coaching programs or any other form of professional development (Roskos, Risko, & Vukelich, 1998; Hiebert, Gallimore, & Stigler, 2002).

Additionally, these changes, which are focused on technical knowledge, are insufficient to create the transformative kind of changes that go beyond the ideology of merely fixing teacher practice to fix students. Indeed, to help teachers develop into reflective and reflexive professionals, they need more than to merely conform their teaching to prescriptive literacy programs and measures. Rather than engage the practical and emancipatory interests, it is simplistic to focus research and professional development on technical interests that may be easier to measure and implement. This has been critiqued as a “pervasive ideology” (Cranton, 1996, p. 17) that leaves out the other important knowledges and interests, in favor of the easily measured and defined technical interests.

### ***Practical interests***

The findings from many coaching studies may also be categorized as practical interests, as defined by Habermas (1971). In transformative learning, Mezirow refers to this type of learning as communicative learning (Mezirow, 2000). These findings are more centered on changes in understanding and sociality. These studies focus on the relational and social aspects of teaching and coaching. Such findings include the tensions between teachers, coaches, and administrators in defining roles and expectations, changes in teacher efficacy, and understandings about how context affects coaching. These studies share several themes that help contextualize and problematize the more technical nature of some of the other findings. Unlike the studies that focused on the technical interests, practical interests favor qualitative design and interpretation.

In their observations and interviews of 20 reading first coaches, Bean, Draper, Hall, Vandermole, and Sigmund (2010) observed that the emphasis of the coach was of a more social and contextual nature. Rather than focusing on specific pedagogies, coaches spent their time with teachers trying to understand student learning difficulties and challenges and how teachers interact with their settings. Coaches, in particular, spent much of their time using student data to work with teachers in developing differentiated instruction. As such, coaching was highly impacted by the individual classroom contexts.

Although describing the coach as a *mentor*, Achinstein and Barrett (2004) described how a person in a coaching position could help novice teachers examine their teaching practices and relationships in new ways. They observed that as the mentors discussed their observations and experiences with the novice teachers; they offered frames of thinking that helped the new teachers focus less on classroom management “a managerial frame”, and more on a “human relations frame” or a “political frame” (p. 727). These frames of thinking came from the mentor’s years of experience as a teacher. As teachers reviewed their experiences through their mentor’s frames, they became more focused on individual learners and groups of students who were often overlooked. Rather than viewing diversity as a classroom management issue, the mentors helped the novice teachers shift their thinking and understanding to a broader, contextualized frame that suggested that the teacher could successfully teach all students. The authors suggest that mentoring (as well as coaching) could be an effective way to help teachers tune into the needs of linguistically and racially diverse students as well as their own cultural understandings.

Vandenburg and Stephens (2010) conducted a study to examine how a coach impacts teachers’ beliefs, and what teachers value about coaching. Through interviewing 35 teachers,

they found several important themes. They found that teachers valued their collaborative experiences with coaches as well as felt supported by their coaches. Teachers stated that in this environment, and with the help of their coaches, they felt empowered to try new instructional approaches, incorporate authentic assessments, and create a more student-centered curriculum.

In their examination of the impact of the context on the success of a coaching program, researchers found that the leadership style of the school's principal affected how teachers received coaching. In schools where the principal granted the coach autonomy in allocating their time, teachers were more willing to spend time with the literacy coaches. One of the hindrances to a school's successful implementation of coaching was the pre-existing norms and expectations for collaboration. In schools where collaboration was already the norm, teachers were resistant to coaching; preferring what they already had developed. Teachers felt resistant to adopting the coaches' instructional agenda and assumed that literacy coaching was merely a fad that would soon pass away. In schools where collaboration was not already an expectation, teachers were much more receptive to coaches. This study also found that as new teachers came to schools with established coaching programs, the coaching systems and expectations of collaboration as well as the implementation of text discussion standards were quickly adopted. (Matsumura, Garnier, & Resnick, 2010; Matsumura, Garnier, Correnti, Junker, & Bickel, 2010).

Three of the empirical studies that employed coaching examined teacher efficacy. Teacher efficacy is the sense a teacher has about their ability to influence or achieve a specific outcome, specifically to influence student achievement. It comes both from the teachers' beliefs about their abilities, as well as his or her technical skill. As such, it represents an amalgam of both technical and practical knowledges. With a higher sense of efficacy, teachers are more motivated to put effort into effective instruction (Bandura, 1986). A professional development

program for improving instruction for students with reading disabilities found that their combination of traditional trainings and coaching resulted in an increased sense of efficacy among the participants, which teachers connected to their greater understandings of reading problems (Lovett, et al., 2008). Employing a control group, a second study found that teachers who participated in weeklong summer institute with two follow-up workshops on content literacy and were coached monthly in specific instructional methods reported higher efficacy than teachers who participated in the professional development but did not receive the coaching. Coaching sessions focused on team meetings that discussed ongoing work, one-on-one planning sessions, and modeling lessons. Unlike earlier studies on efficacy, this study looked at efficacy as a group measure rather than a measure of an individual's sense of efficacy (Cantrell & Hughes, 2008). A third study attempts to bridge student achievement with teacher efficacy and coaching. In classrooms with teachers who reported high levels of efficacy, student achievement was found to be higher; however, the researcher did not find that coaching was more beneficial to teachers who already reported high levels of efficacy (Ross, 1992). These efficacy findings echo the later work of Showers and Joyce (1996) who found that teachers engaged in coaching were more apt to try new methods appropriately, as well as evaluate how well those methods worked. Such teachers were also more collaborative and willing to pool resources.

Three descriptive studies about the practices associated with literacy coaching add further understanding, particularly around the experience of changing understanding through coaching. These studies reflect the practical interests of Habermas' knowledge constitutive interests in that they focus more on the process of understanding that is taking place in regards to coaching. Gibson's (2006) description of the practice of an expert reading coach observes how the reading coach maintains the stance of an expert in her use of pedagogical reasoning and co-construction

of the coaching agenda. Gibson then traces how the coach's understandings change over time to more realistic expectations of the complex and time consuming nature of coaching. This study highlights the tension a coach may feel between being an expert in the content, and allowing the teacher the opportunity to engage in their own learning.

Steckel (2009) interviewed and observed literacy coaches in urban schools to determine what is required to make an impact on teacher learning. According to Steckel, the school setting where coaching occurs is an important aspect to understanding how coaching changes schools. A school culture that encourages learning and risk-taking; as well as coaching that empowers teachers to independently resolve problems in the classroom are characteristics that should be present for a literacy coach to help a teacher improve their instruction.

Gersten, Morvant, and Brengelman (1995) observed general education teachers and special education coaches who were tasked with helping the teachers accommodate students with learning disabilities. The researchers noted that the coaches, whose background was in special education, were challenged by the different orientations toward special education held by general education teachers. As such, there was considerable tension created when the special education coaches simply told the general education teachers *what* to do, denying them the chance to learn *why* the special education coaches were encouraging such a strategy. The coaches in this study observed teachers and provided feedback, focused on the impact of teachers' instruction on target students, and provided concrete suggestions for improving instruction. Successful coaching came as the special education coaches learned the "importance of modulating their coaching to the needs, desires, interests, and abilities of the individual teachers" (p. 61).

Through surveys, interviews, and observations, Ippolito (2010) examined the ways that literacy coaches create balance between the directive needs of teachers and administrators with

the responsive need to support adult learning and professional teachers. He found that literacy coaches were aware of the tension between these two demands in all their work with teachers. In order to create a balance between these two needs, coaches used protocols, or agreed upon norms and expectations, in their interactions with teachers. These protocols provided transparency and direction so that the coaches and teachers were sure to address both directive and responsive needs. Teachers and literacy coaches were also explicit in how they shared leadership roles with administrators to create a more collaborative environment.

Another study noted that the nature of cognitive coaching was difficult for the coach. The coaches struggle with not simply giving teachers straightforward answers rather than encouraging teachers to think it through and try something different. Both teachers and coaches wanted to simply have the coach give the answers. However, letting the teacher come up with answers is necessary to produce a sustainable habit of mind that will continue in the absence of the coach (Garmston, Linder, & Whitaker, 1993).

Garmston's study of coaching further reveals the impact a coach can have on a teacher's practice. In this study, Garmston coached two high school teachers. One teacher had a very traditional structured and teacher centered style of teaching. The other teacher's style was more constructivist and student centered. Both were considered to be expert teachers. In reviewing the teacher's reflective journals, Garmston learned that both teachers felt that the coaching experience was very helpful to them in expanding their teaching style. They became "bi-cognitive" such that the two teachers could appreciate and borrow from both teaching styles. The two teachers planned on coaching each other at the end of the study (Garmston, Linder, & Whitaker, 1993)



In observing and interviewing middle school literacy coaches, Smith (2007) found that the context of the school greatly impacted the work of the coaches as well as teachers' perceptions of coaching. As the coaches struggled to fill their many assigned roles, their work became fragmented and unfocused. Smith proposes that coaches could more fully realize their potential when they focus on "bridging the gap between out-of classroom and in-classroom places on teachers' professional knowledge landscapes" (Smith, 2007, p.65). Thus, implying that the changes a coach may create in schools depends on their abilities to focus coaching on the individual needs of the teachers.

### Discussion

One practical theme that was common to these studies centers on the tensions of coaching. Teachers felt tension about having a coach come in to their classroom to make changes for which the teachers did not feel ready (Gersten, Morvant & Brengelman, 1995). Coaches felt tension between maintaining an expert stance in their content and coaching and being aware of the personal needs and inclinations of the teacher, recognizing that coaching is not simply a method of transferring expertise (Gibson, 2006). Tension was noted in that although effective coaching is not a top-down process, yet administrators play a key role in creating spaces for coaching to happen (Steckel 2009, Walpole & Blamey, 2008).

Another theme that was evident is the importance of social norms and expectations. Gersten and colleagues (1995) observed that norms of collaboration, inquiry, and problem solving were found in schools with successful coaching. These social norms were not just limited to the teachers being coached, but were also present in the school at large. Both Gibson (2006) and Steckel (2009) noted the importance of the sociality between the teachers and the coaches. They identified that coaching was not simply a transfer of new knowledge, but that the social

context of the school and the teacher as well as the teachers' and coaches' beliefs all played a role in the co-constructed coaching process.

The studies which focused on the practical side of literacy coaching provide compelling evidence that the potential of coaching extends beyond merely helping teachers to technically alter their practices, although that technical knowledge is intricately interwoven into the social understandings coaches helped teachers gain. Understanding the local contexts that are fraught with issues of disparate demands on time, political relationships with teachers and administrators, and the self-efficacy of all involved yields a more complicated and nuanced view of literacy coaching. In addition to having technical abilities to transfer to teachers, coaches need understanding of how to negotiate multiple demands with local contexts in order to effect change.

In his critique of the social sciences and practical interests, Habermas noted (1984) that they were too subjective and dependent on supposition and conjecture. Although a focus on the practical interests provides important understandings of the human condition, he claimed that it is insufficient on its own to create change. Indeed, in this literature, the understandings literacy coaches helped teachers gain of social contexts were seen to interact with technical changes in instruction. Change and development require technical interests and emancipatory interests to work in conjunction with the practical interests.

### ***Emancipatory interests***

Habermas' final category of constitutive interests, emancipatory interests, goes beyond the scope of the technical and practical interests. These interests pull in Habermas' theory of communicative action, with its emphasis on communication that is free from external agendas. Emancipatory interests include the desire of an individual to grow and develop, as well as to be

free from distortion (Habermas 1971, Cranton, 1996). If experimental sciences focus on technical interests and social sciences focus on practical interests, then critical social sciences are the most appropriate research methodology for emancipatory interests (Habermas 1971).

Mezirow, recalling the work of Habermas (1971), noted that, “emancipatory knowledge is knowledge gained through critical self-reflection, as distinct from the knowledge gained from our ‘technical’ interest in the objective world or our ‘practical’ interest in social relationships. Mezirow states, “the form of inquiry in critical self-reflection is appraisive rather than prescriptive or designative” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 87). In his own work, Mezirow refers to this kind of knowledge as transformative knowledge.

In the coaching literature, findings that may be defined by emancipatory interests are not as apparent. Rather, the focus of change and reflection in most of the literacy coaching literature mostly emphasizes learning how to provide new or better literacy instruction. Furthermore, many of the literacy coaching studies have involved coaching models where teachers were not involved in the construction of the coaching agenda. Yet, for an adult education initiative, such as coaching, to be critical, then it must also be self-directed by the learner (Brookfield, 1993).

There are moments, however, of critical insights to be found in the literacy coaching literature. For example, Achinstein and Barrett (2004) note in their observations that mentors play an important role in shifting the teachers’ frame of thinking about their students by offering a human relations frame and a political frame that “identifies inequities, power, and classrooms as arenas of change.” (p. 738). This goes beyond the more common literacy coaching approach of focusing merely on instruction to both looking at the power relationships between students and their worlds and seeing the classroom as a place where change can be made to rectify inequities.

In Rainville and Jones' (2008) observations and interviews with a literacy coach, issues of power and identity also are apparent. They note that as literacy coaches move between classrooms and the social contexts shift, the coach must negotiate identities. They observe that this complication requires "deep understandings" about one's positioning, and that coaches must become "more cognizant of how power operates in their work and how to be responsive in one's positioning" (Rainville & Jones, 2008, p. 448). Again, issues of power surface in these observations of literacy coaching, yet this time; they focus the issues on power relationships between teachers and coaches.

Basile, Olson, and Nathenson-Mejia (2003) observed that student teachers engaged with a cognitive coach followed a cycle of reflection that changed the longer the teachers were coached. The teachers in this study, who were beginning their student teaching, first focused on minute details of their cooperating teacher's instruction. As they began to reflect further, the teachers reflected on their own efficacy and instruction. With continued coaching, these new teachers began to also reflect on the more global and complex problems in teaching, rather than just on their own practice.

Burkins (2007) also offers her conception and experiences of how literacy coaches may help teachers become more critical. As a White woman married to an African-American man, she recalls having several coaching experiences where teachers were unaware or unwilling to consider the role of race in their classrooms. She encourages coaches to consider their own race and to be critical friends that can help teachers reflect on race in education and in their own classrooms.

## **Summary and discussion of findings**

In thinking about literacy coaching models and Habermas' theory of communicative action, it is evident that there are more possibilities for deliberative democracy using this cognitive coaching model. By not having the literacy agenda set outside the relationship between the coach and the teacher, there is a greater opportunity for teachers and coaches to act and communicate uncoerced. This, of course, also depends on how the teachers are set up with coaches. If teachers are mandated to participate in literacy coaching, it is hard to imagine how it could become communicative action as theorized by Habermas.

The constitutive knowledges are useful in examining how literacy coaching changes literacy teaching. In the technical knowledge category, teachers and coaches worked on expanding teaching repertoires to include new instructional practices and techniques. The successful transfer of skills, a technical knowledge, is certainly evident in the content coaching literature. From the origins of content coaching through the variations, transfer is an essential component. Also technical is the content coaching literature focused on student achievement. Reflecting the process-product paradigm, student achievement is the desired outcome of the transfer of skills.

Evident in the cognitive coaching literature is an emphasis on the practical knowledge. Teachers reported that the coaching helped them improve their relationships with students, as well as feel more empowered and efficacious. The practical knowledge is also represented in the content coaching literature. The focus on understanding the tensions coaches and teachers experience, as well as the focus on the role of the social context in content coaching are all practical knowledge. The discussion of teacher efficacy in the content coaching literature straddles both the technical and practical knowledges. The technical aspect of efficacy centers on

knowing which teaching skills and practices will produce the desired student achievement. This technical knowledge also has a practical aspect in that the literature focuses on the understanding of teachers' emotive state as they feel or do not feel efficacious. What is not represented in the content coaching literature is the emancipatory knowledge, where Mezirow theorizes transformative learning occurs. The researchers do not report on the teachers or coaches reflecting on the more global aspects of education and their role in content coaching models. Admittedly, it may be happening, but that has not been the focus of the researchers.

Although there were only a few glimmers of evidence of emancipatory knowledge in literacy coaching, the literature does suggest that coaching may be a catalyst for emancipatory changes. For example, literacy coaches helped new teachers begin to reflect not only on their own practice, but also on the global role of education and how that affects their practice. The evidence is scant, and follow-up studies would need to be conducted to see if there are more examples of how literacy coaching engages emancipatory knowledge.

In looking at both content coaching and cognitive coaching through the lens of communicative action and constitutive knowledge, insight into the possibilities of coaching is evident. Although the research is still sparse, evidence of all three constitutive knowledges are found in cognitive coaching, as is the possibility for communicative action. Content coaching also provides evidence of technical and practical knowledges, and certainly does not preclude emancipatory knowledge. Figure 1 provides a succinct summary of how coaching and Habermas may be tied together.

Figure 1: A Habermasian Approach to Coaching

	The coach is an expert in:	Who determines the coaching agenda:	Knowledge-constitutive interests:	Expected outcomes:
<b>Content Coaching</b>	Content knowledge, targeted program	Administrators, Researchers	Technical Practical	Improved teacher skills, instruction
<b>Cognitive Coaching</b>	Coaching, reflection	Teachers, Coaches	Technical Practical Emancipatory	Reflective and critical teachers

Many details about what the coaches and teachers worked on and talked about in their literacy coaching sessions are not found in the literature, making it difficult to trace exactly what and how coaching changes teaching. However, it is hard to imagine a scenario where content coaching, with the subject of the coaching being determined by someone outside of the conversation, could be considered communicative action. Either district administrators or researchers have set the coaching agenda before the teacher and the coach get involved. This does not mean that this way of coaching should not be done – certainly some of these outcomes show positive growth and changes in instruction. In denying teachers the opportunity to manage their own professional development, their potential to arrive at the deliberative democratic possibilities is diminished. That being noted, constitutive knowledge is still useful in reflecting on what is happening in these coaching situations.

The evidence from the coaching literature does suggest that coaching may be able to serve many purposes in an educational setting. Literacy coaching may be used to effectively help

teachers learn new practices and skills, improve their sense of efficacy, and become more reflective practitioners. It can also help teachers engage in democracy and critical thinking in their own professional development. It is certainly desirable for teachers to engage all three of Habermas' constitutive knowledges in the professional development. Such multivariate purposes of professional development are essential to whole, healthy, and democratic schools. Coaching is a promising way of opening these avenues to teachers, and may begin to address Cummins' (2001) statement about the need for schools to change the ways they relate to children before they can address the achievement gap. Coaching may help schools and teachers acknowledge their role in empowering and disempowering students at a grass roots level, and arrive at Pennycook's (2001) position that "views language as inherently political; understands power more in terms of its micro operations in relation to questions of class, race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and so on; and argues that we must also account for the politics of knowledge" (p. 42). In effect, coaching may be an avenue through which teachers can become more aware of the political and power issues that are present in their classrooms and in their instruction. In particular, it may provide a trusted and critical companion that helps them become aware and act upon their new understandings. This, ultimately, is the trajectory for the professional expedition teachers must take.

In addition to the literacy coach's role of providing knowledgeable insight into literacy instruction, there are rich possibilities for transformative learning in literacy coaching. Mezirow theorized that transformative learning often begins with an unsettling or disorienting experience. A skillful literacy coach can ask the kinds of questions that may be a catalyst for such an experience. In fact, having a literacy coach as a reflective partner that purposely pushes a teachers thinking about the learning and the context of the classroom throughout the



transformative learning experience may specifically help teachers who are bewildered by the diversity of their classroom. Parks-Daloz (2000) notes that as people experience new cultures, having a mentoring community to help them make sense of the experience can lead to transformative learning. The literacy coach can turn such experiences into “constructive engagements with otherness” (p. 110). A mentoring community, such as a literacy coach, provides teachers with an opportunity to not only make sense of the cultural mismatches they experience, but to embrace such experiences, learn from them, and help their students to engage with literacy in ways that maximizes both learning and democratic discourse.

Like Little’s (1993) critique of professional development’s mismatch with the goals of reform movements, coaching has been contained and limited in its adherence to prescriptive programs instead of teacher development. This training approach may not only be regarded as less-effective form of adult learning and professional development, it does not have the transformative potential that a more cognitive coaching approach embodies. Such open approaches to literacy coaching is necessary to develop professional literacy instructors who have the skills, dispositions, and critical approach that can help schools change their disjointed relationships with students, particularly those students who have traditionally not experience successful schooling experiences. Traditional forms of professional development that heavily emphasize the training of teachers in prescriptive programs in decontextualized settings are insufficient to change the ways schools and teachers relate to children. Unfortunately, much of the coaching research has focused on the capacity of coaching to train teachers. However, the potential of having a thoughtful literacy coach who is unencumbered by the demands of a prescriptive training role to become a reflective partner to teachers has the theoretical capacity to

begin to address such an important issue. Such teachers will grow in their capacity to notice and act on what they observe.

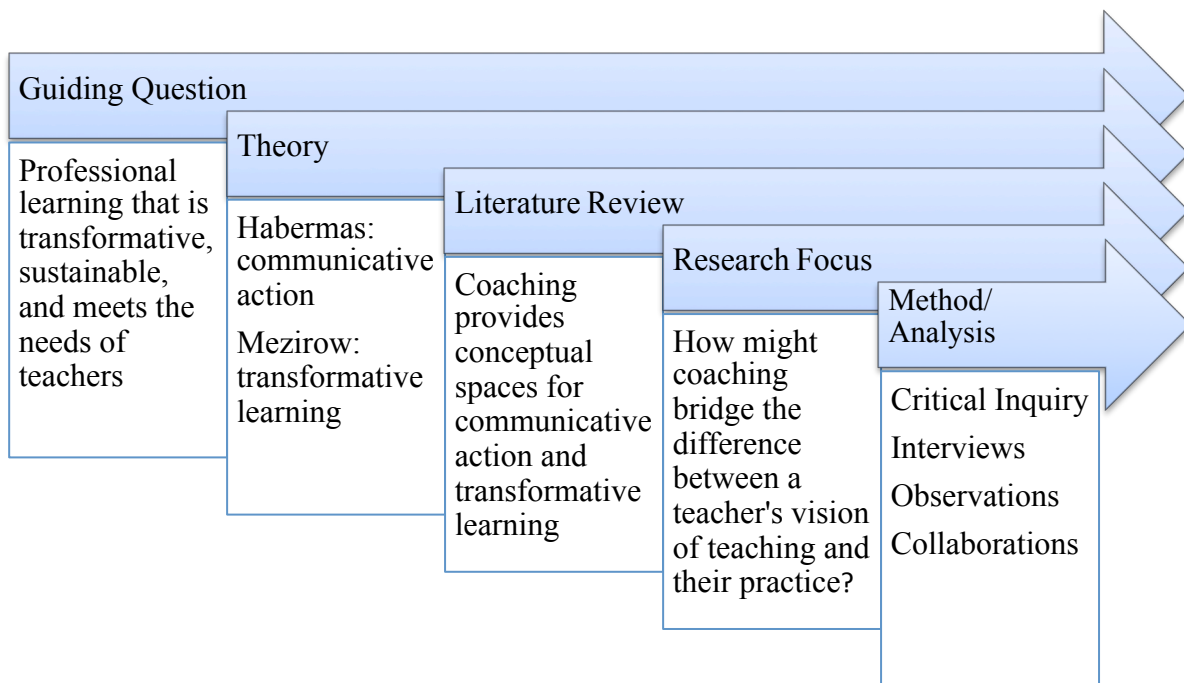
## Chapter 3

### Methodology

#### Approach

The review of both the theoretical and the empirical literacy coaching literature reveals that there is a space for communicative action and learning that is potentially transformative and democratic. Such a space could be a site of resistance against top-down professional development. However, this space has not been sufficiently explored or verified. Questions about what and how a teacher might use such a space are not answered in the coaching literature. As such, the guiding question for this study centers on how coaching can support teachers in professional development or professional learning that is sustainable, transformative, and meets the needs of the teacher. Figure 2 provides an overview of how the guiding questions, theory, and methods are situated.

Figure 2: Relationship between Questions, Theory, and Methods



Sustainable professional development speaks to learning enduring principles of instruction and developing professional judgment rather than the packaged program du jour. Sustainability in professional development includes creating generative habits of thinking and an inquiry approach with teachers regarding their practice. Dozier, Johnston, and Rogers (1993) speak of the sustainable aspect of coaching when they instruct coaches to create the conditions where “teachers notice, theorize, productively critique, and build a sustaining learning community” (p. 33). This sustainable learning extends beyond the formal coaching situation into the quotidian aspects of teaching and learning.

Professional development is transformative when it meets the conditions described by Mezirow (1991) and Kegan (2000). Transformative learning is characterized by a change or development in a learner’s approach and interpretation of their learning. In effect, transformative learning does not merely add to a person’s knowledge or understanding, rather it alters the manner in which a person understands or knows. Kegan provides the example of a container that is being filled with liquid. He describes typical learning as the addition of another liquid, which changes the amount and composition of the container’s contents. In transformative learning however, the shape and/or size of the container are what are being changed. In such learning experiences, the role of a supportive other who supports the learner in becoming critically reflective and efficacious is crucial (Mezirow, 2000; Taylor, 2000).

Professional development meets the needs of teachers when it is the teachers that choose the emphases and foci of their own learning. According to Franke, Carpenter, Levi, and Fennema (2001), the professional development of teachers is successful when the teachers’ instruction is “driven by their own inquiry” (p. 656). It is therefore necessary that teachers formulate problems

and solutions in the professional development process. As such, I focused on developing a coached inquiry process for teachers that centers on critical reflection and inquiry and creates a space where teachers conduct inquiry into their practice.

To understand the professional development of teachers, it is important to understand both the current contextual factors as well as the historicity of the educational environment in which the teacher works. Teachers do not develop professionally in a vacuum; rather their own learning experiences, teaching histories, life histories and contexts are essential to understanding how they are interacting with professional development (Kelchtermans, 1999). As such, this research not only examines professional learning, but also the context in which that development takes place. Much of the research has taken a more atomistic approach to studying professional development, focusing on the efficacy of the delivery of professional development. Rather, this study employs a more holistic and situated approach, as advocated in a review of professional development research (Webster-Wright, 2009), that “respects and retains the complexity and diversity of [professional development] experiences, with the aim of developing insights into better ways to support professionals” (p. 714).

The broader question about how a coach might support transformational learning requires sustained research and study spanning years. This study; however, has a smaller and more exploratory scope. Recognizing that the opportunity for a teacher to guide his or her own professional development with the support of a coach could be an essential characteristic of transformative learning, this study seeks to understand the intricacies involved in the construction of a professional development agenda. According to Darling-Hammond (1993), “reforms that rely on the transformative power of individuals to rethink their practice and to redesign their institutions can be accomplished by investing in individual and organizational

learning, in the human capital of the educational enterprise” (p. 754). In essence, this study is an exploration of a micro-reform that takes place on the individual level.

## **Research Questions**

After reviewing the literature on communicative action and cognitive coaching, an avenue of study becomes apparent. This study employs a cognitive coaching model in a setting designed with communicative action in mind to examine how these might impact a teacher’s professional learning. Although the literature clearly describes the ideal setting for communicative action, introducing coaching into that setting yields some unanswered questions. These constitute the research questions and sub questions for this study. The first question traces teacher’s foci in a professional development context.

1. On what aspects of professional practice do teachers focus when given the opportunity to design their own professional development?

In other words, in a professional development setting that encourages teachers to guide their own learning, what do the participating teachers emphasize? As seen in the coaching literature, there is a space for transformative learning created in such a setting. Although such learning may not be visible in the short term, there may be suggestions of transformative learning in the long term. Therefore, in answering the first research question, I look for evidence of nascent transformative learning in those aspects of teaching on which the participants focus.

Certainly, a teacher’s vision or beliefs about education and the teacher’s role in a student’s education also are central to understanding the choices a teacher makes (Vaughn & Faircloth, 2011; Hammerness, 2001, 2003; Duffy, 2002). As such, to more fully understand what teachers emphasize while participating in this professional development approach, an

appreciation of their educational vision is important. The second research question and sub questions focus on the participants' visions and how that informs the professional development choices they make, as well as the impact of the context.

2. How does a teacher's vision of teaching align with their professional development choices?
  - How do teachers describe their vision of teaching?
  - How does the instructional context (e.g. administrative expectations, policies, student needs, and parent expectations) impact the enactment of the teachers' vision of teaching?

Answering these questions provides insight into not only how the participating teachers experience the coaching and professional development, but also into how their vision of teaching is impacted by the context in which they teach.

The final research questions for this study focus on the coaching aspect of this professional development experience. The coaching literature enumerates many tools for coaches to use as they work with teachers (Dozier, 2006), and these questions examine two possible additions to those tools. The first question focuses on how a coach might use the understanding of the teacher's vision of teaching as a tool to help teachers become more critical and reflective regarding their practice and their setting as well as more integrous with aligning their instruction with their vision.

3. How might a coach use a teacher's vision as a coaching tool?
  - How might a coach help a teacher to align their instruction with their educational vision?

#### 4. How might a coach use video guided interviews as a coaching tool?

The second tool centers on conducting video guided interviews with teachers as a tool to help teachers critically reflect on their classroom instruction and become more adept at noticing and identifying areas of growth in their practice. In the following sections I discuss my approach and methodology to answering these questions.

### **Research Design**

The research design for this study is qualitative, critical, and mainly descriptive. Following the traditional strengths of qualitative research, this design was chosen for its emphasis on flexibility, openness, and its sensitivity to issues of the human condition (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) This research design is also critical in the sense that it is constructed to give teachers an opportunity to critically reflect on their instruction and their professional context with the potential of encouraging action to bring their profession in line with their values and vision. This research design is therefore mainly descriptive. Of course, any interaction carries the potential of an observer effect despite all attempts at distance. In this case, the research questions call for descriptive analysis, as well as a period of collaborative action between the researcher and the participants.

### **Researcher's role**

In any research design, the role of the researcher is very important. In a sense, my role of researcher is also the role of the coach and facilitator, while the participation in research of the participants in this study blurs the line between researcher and participant. In this study, my role is more of a participant observer, which emphasizes the importance of being close to the field of the participants and recognizing the researcher's impact on that field (Goffman, 2001). In line with the contextual demands of communicative action, transformative learning, and cognitive



coaching, my role includes maintaining a setting of open communication that encourages the participants to reflect, question, and design a professional development experience that suits their needs. In order to address the tension around the role of the coach found in the coaching literature and maintain a stance that is inductive to communicative action, I focused my interactions with the teacher participants on their constructions and perceptions of their situation. This means that the foci of this investigation are on their vision of teaching, their teaching objectives, and their interpretations of their local context.

Of course, as a researcher, I cannot claim to be a neutral or objective participant for reasons that are both apparent and less apparent to the participants. Emerson (2001) draws attention to the importance of recognizing important researcher characteristics in participant observation such as age, gender, racial and ethnic identity, and insider/outsider issues. Being a White male attending the premier educational research institution may certainly provide me with access and authority, but it also impacts my ability to create a setting where the participants feel empowered to fully participate. The apparent aspects of my position in this study are that I come with an education in research, imbued with authority and access from the site's administration, and a temporary stake in the welfare of the setting. Yet, as a graduate student, as opposed to a professor, and as someone who is not an employee or representing the school district, my positioning may be more approachable for the participants. As such, participants could feel freer to choose whether or not to participate without worrying about repercussions.

Less apparent to the participants, but equally important to understanding my role are my own experiences and agendas I bring to this study, in short, my own vision of teaching. Having taught and coached for seven years in a setting similar to the research site provides me with a wealth of experience, perspectives, and theories that will impact the decisions, questions,

interpretations, and actions I make in this study. It can also provide me with a sense of credibility in working with teachers in this situation. In addition, I have an educational agenda that puts primary emphasis on culturally and linguistically diverse students and their literacy learning. Recognizing my own relevant agendas and philosophies means that I must be particularly thoughtful in my approach to working with the participants to avoid the situation where my agenda supplants their agenda (Emerson, 2001). As such, one of my roles is to recognize the impact I have had on this study.

As such, I recognize that my vision of teaching includes several key ideas that may impinge on both my actions in the research setting and my interpretations of the results thereof. I feel strongly that a classroom should be a site of innovation and experimentation. In effect, teachers are the best source of both classroom knowledge and student knowledge, and through their consistent and creative efforts can find teaching methods that will help their students. In particular, I believe that this approach is appropriate when a teacher gets to work with students of diverse backgrounds. When a teacher's traditional approach is not meeting the needs of the students, then it is incumbent on the teacher to find new approaches.

This approach to innovative and responsive teaching lines up with my vision of the roles of administration and teachers. For example, I am suspicious of packaged curricula that lead to a one-size-fits-all type of instruction. When districts, states, or school administrations impose their curricular agendas on teachers, it stifles the spaces where innovation, creativity, differentiation, and responsiveness may flourish. In a similar vein, when the assessment of teachers and students also do not permit such spaces, I find this contrary to my vision of teaching. In my vision it is completely appropriate and even preferred for a teacher to subvert such imposed agenda and instruct in the best interests of the students.

## **Setting**

### ***School***

The site for this study is in a middle school that lies on the rural outskirts of a Southern metro area in an area that is transitioning between being a distinct rural community to a bedroom community of the urban core. According to the school's latest statistics, 68 percent of students at Stetson Middle School are White, with the majority of the remainder identified as African-American. For the sake of anonymity, the school and all participants are given pseudonyms. Also significant is that over two thirds of students who are classified by the school district as economically disadvantaged. In two of the last four years, this school did not make Adequate Yearly Progress according to federal standards, losing their good standing rating in 2006, 2007, and again in 2010. This is important because it suggests that participants might feel vulnerable to federal consequences if they do not raise test scores, and thus may be more open to help with figuring out how to move forward.

### ***Participants***

The target group of participants in this study was full time teachers. Aligning with the purpose of the study and the requirement of in-depth study, I recruited a purposeful sample (Cresswell, 2002) of four participating teachers. Although due to the exploratory nature of this study, the results do not report very much about long-term sustainability of this professional development model, having teachers whose working context encouraged and allowed them to collaborate is notable in that the teachers are theoretically more able to sustain each other in their professional development. Therefore, I recruited teacher participants for this study who work together regularly on the seventh grade team. They shared lunch together daily, jointly

supervised students during recess, as well as met together often in informal settings to plan and discuss instruction for students.

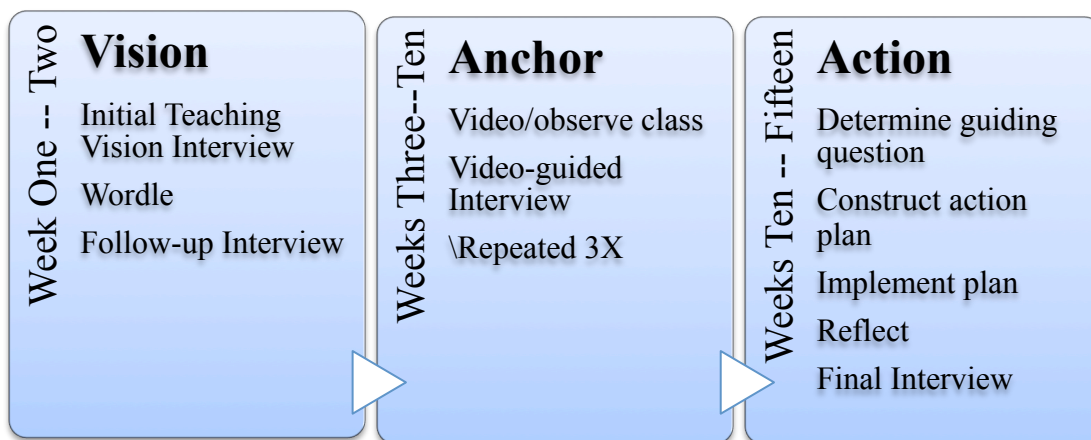
Another important characteristic of this sample is that the teachers represent differing points along the trajectory of a teacher's career. Studies have shown that teachers have different experiences, motivations, and needs with their professional development at different phases in the careers (Huberman, 1989, 1993; Day & Gu, 2007; Rinke, 2008) The four core participants therefore include teachers whose years of professional teaching varies. Jon has taught at Stetson Middle School for six years. He teaches the geography courses on the seventh grade team. Islena is a first year teacher who teaches reading and English courses. At Stetson Middle, English and reading are seen as separate content areas, with the English courses focusing mostly on composition. Leah is in her second year at Stetson, but this is her fifth year of teaching reading. Finally, Nora is a second year teacher who teaches English classes. Although these teacher participants certainly do not represent the full gamut of teachers, they bring varied educational experiences and approaches to the study. Additional consented participants include members of the school and district administration as well as four additional teachers who agreed to be interviewed to establish contextual understanding of the professional learning culture at Stetson Middle School.

## **Method**

I designed the study to consist of three primary elements that address the research questions (see Figure 3). The first of these elements involved an exploration of the participants' views or visions of teaching and of their own professional learning. The second consists of observation of and joint reflection on the participant's actual instructional practices. The final

element centered on designing a coached inquiry project on a topic the participant would like to either change in their instruction or learn more about.

Figure 3: Study Timeline



The first element consisted of creating a baseline of understanding into the four primary participants and the context in which they taught. I interviewed the primary group of participating teachers as well as the principal and vice-principal at Stetson Middle to understand their role and vision for professional learning at their school. The purpose of these interviews was to gain greater insight into the educational visions and beliefs of the participants as well as into their personal narratives. Interviews with school administrators and four additional teachers provided important data to begin to appreciate the school context and culture in regards to professional learning. Interview questions focused on gaining understanding into the participant teachers and administrators' visions of teaching and experiences with professional learning.

The second primary element of this study also took the form of interviews; however these interviews focused more specifically on the actual instruction in the classroom. I refer to these interviews as video-guided interviews because they took place while watching video of the teachers' instruction. The final element of this study, the coaching cycles, comes directly from

the coaching literature. In this final part, I coached the participants in the creation of an action research project designed around what the participating teachers viewed as their needs. These elements are presently described in more detail.

### *Vision of teaching interviews*

Context plays an essential role in both professional development and in qualitative research. I bring not only my own experiences as a coach, teacher, and researcher but also an approach designed to encourage teachers to think about their classrooms in transformative ways, so it was necessary to spend considerable time and effort in understanding this context. Understanding context is much more than just an enumeration of places, times, and titles involved with the professional development. It also involves “implicit workplace expectations hidden as agendas” (Webster-Wright, 2009, p. 723). To better understand the context I interviewed the participant teachers, the principal, vice-principal, and a four other teachers that worked with the four participants (see Appendices A and B). These interviews supplied 13 hours of audio data.

Recognizing the important role that a teacher’s beliefs play in professional growth (Smylie, 1988), one purpose of these initial semi-structured interviews (Appendix B) with the teachers was to understand their teaching history, personal narratives, and beliefs. In interviewing and observing teachers about their vision of teaching, Hammerness (2001) concluded that “attending to the visions of individual teachers may represent a powerful foundation for improvement efforts” (p. 158). Questions in these interviews come from two studies that focused on understanding a teacher’s vision of teaching. In an attempt to describe what makes a teacher impactful, Duffy (2002) claims that mere knowledge of and adherence to best practices is insufficient. Through surveys and interviews, he looks at the vision of teaching

to which teachers ascribe, and describes how that vision enables teachers to make sound professional judgment in the face of restrictive and controlled learning environments. In interviewing teachers to learn about their vision of teaching, Vaughn and Faircloth (2011) found that the teachers' visions of teaching helped them to resist the pressures of standardized testing and administrative mandates to provide students with instruction that better suited their needs.

Questions in these interviews focused on the participants' path into teaching and a description of their vision of idealized teaching. Interview questions also address obstacles to implementing instruction according to their vision, as well as their experience with professional learning. Borrowing from the interview protocols of these two studies (Hammerness, 2001; Vaughn & Faircloth, 2011) I constructed a semi-structured interview protocol focused on understanding the participating teachers' vision of teaching (see Appendix A for protocol). Of course, the follow-up questions and probes that are an essential aspect of qualitative interviewing (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) are not included on the protocol as these are primarily asked in regards to the interviewee's responses. This initial interview took between one hour and an hour and a half with each of the four core teacher participants.

In order to reinforce the validity of these interviews in representing a cohesive understanding of the teacher's educational vision and as a tool for later parts of this study, I condensed the participant's interview responses into a Wordle. A Wordle relies on a word count in a given text, the text in this case being the participant's transcribed interview responses, to create an image where the most oft used words are displayed in larger, bolder letters, while less oft used words are smaller (see Appendix I). To create this Wordle, I transcribed the initial interview and coded the participants' responses that focus on their vision of teaching. I collected the phrases coded as *vision of teaching* and entered them into the online program to create the

Wordle, which served as a graphic representation of the teachers' visions of teaching. I then emailed the Wordle to the participants, informing them of the process by which it was created. On my next meeting with each teacher we talked about how well the Wordle represents his or her vision for teaching. The purpose of this was to give the participants an opportunity to member-check and respond to the representation of their teaching beliefs as a whole. It also created an opportunity to revisit their vision of teaching after a time to reconsider and reflect on their responses. The Wordle became a useful tool in the succeeding parts of the study.

Additionally, in recognition of their impact on local professional development at the school, I conducted an interview with the principal and the vice-principal at Stetson Middle to understand their views of professional learning, as well as their agenda for the teachers' professional learning (see Appendix B for protocol). The interviews with these administrative personnel served a different purpose. These semi-structured interviews were designed to help me understand the local professional learning context and expectations from an administrative standpoint. The administrative interview also helped me to understand some of the obstacles that are present in teachers' attempts to teach according to their visions. This was essential not only to my understanding of the participants' context, but also in that a school's administration has a strong impact on how the teachers might experience coaching and professional development (Casey, 2006; Mraz, Algozzine, & Watson, 2008; Ippolito, 2010; Steckel, 2009; Walpole & Blamey, 2008).

These initial interviews with the participants provided findings for the second research question and the third research questions, as well as served a significant role throughout the study. In the second research question, the interviews provided data for the first sub question concerning a description of the participants' vision of teaching. It also provided a basis to trace



through the other parts of the second question. To answer the third research question, the participants' responses are analyzed for their usefulness in creating change. This will be explained in more detail in the analysis section. Refer to Appendix H for alignment of research questions with methods of inquiry.

***Anchor: Video guided interviews***

Using interviews to make tacit understandings more explicit was the focus of Odell, Goswami, and Herrington's (1983) study of the writing practices of people in professional positions. They collected samples of writing from a business executive and used those writings as the basis for conducting an interview where the writer was asked about the writing choices made in the letters. Known as a discourse-based interview, this research method has been adapted to a number of research methods, including research on teaching. In this study, the discourse-based interview will use video recorded sessions of the teachers' instruction as the "discourse-base" to guide the interview.

A number of studies have used video recordings of instruction to in the professional learning of educators. In Kwon and Orrill's (2007) study of teacher reflection, they video-recorded a teacher's instruction and then watched researcher-selected segments from that video with the teacher. While watching the video segments, the researchers asked the teacher reflection questions focused on the students' learning. They observed that, over time, a case-study teacher's reflections while watching the video became more attentive to student understanding and the teacher's role in prompting that understanding. However, this was done with a specific pedagogical goal in mind of the researchers, it did not account for what the teacher perceives as their professional learning needs after viewing the video. This study will build on Kwon and

Orrill's work by employing a similar method, but with the teacher participants choosing the segments instead of the researcher-chosen segments.

Van Es and Sherin (2002) had preservice teachers view videos (in three one-hour sessions) of researcher selected teaching moments and reflect on what they saw. Specifically, the teachers were asked to focus on three areas: student thinking, the teacher's role, and discourse. They found that teachers became more adept at noticing, analyzing, and using evidence to discuss events that marked significant learning moments in their own classrooms. Although video of expert teachers is commonly used as a professional learning tool, Van Es and Sherin note that video is frequently used to provide teachers with exemplars of model instruction rather than as an opportunity for teachers to interpret classroom instruction.

In a study that explored how teachers hear and interpret student speech and actions, Wallach and Even (2005) asked teachers to video record students engaged in a class assignment. The teachers then chose segments of that video recording to discuss with the researchers. What is significant is that several of the teacher's statements did not seem to be in line with what the interviewers were observing in the video. The researchers attribute this to how the teacher's classroom contextual knowledge impacted her interpretation of what she saw in the video. This suggests that in this study, the teacher's understanding of his or her classroom as well as their vision for teaching may be both evident and significant in these video guided interviews. It also reinforces the important role of a coach as someone who can provide alternate frames and help teachers consider other interpretations of their classroom practices (Achinstein & Barrett, 2004).

Describing the importance of "anchoring instruction in rich macro-constructs" when working with teachers such as a video recording, Bransford, Vye, Kinzer and Risko (1990, p. 394) note that the anchor becomes something that is a rich source of information with many

opportunities for noticing, problem identification, and finding relevant issues. As such, this study uses video recordings of a teacher's own instruction as an anchor for reflection and discussion in a professional learning setting. In this study, I used video-guided interviews as an anchor to help teachers to not only make their thinking about instruction more explicit but also as a constructive place to talk about the practical application of their vision of teaching and develop critical reflection skills. After the initial vision of teaching interviews, I asked the teacher to choose a class period that he or she would like to have videotaped with the intent of discussing the instruction. Following the methods recommended in a coaching cycle (Costa & Garmston, 1994; Casey, 2006), I asked the teacher about their objectives for the chosen class period and how they would like the video recording to take place (see Appendix C for protocol). I then videotaped the class period as well as took field notes on my observations following the class. After video recording the class, I left the video recording with the teacher, whom I asked to choose segments of the videotape to watch together. I asked the teacher participants to review the video and choose segments based upon what they would most like to examine in their instruction, focusing on video clips that matched their vision of teaching, clips that did not match their vision of teaching, and clips that contained something they would like to talk about.

Soon after recording, the participating teacher and I watched the video clips selected by the teacher. While watching the video clips, we paused and I asked questions about what they saw that was going well, as well as to critically reflect on the lesson (see Appendix D for protocol). Recognizing that this practice could make the teacher uneasy, I focused the interview questions on the teacher's observations, refraining from making my own evaluations of the instruction. During the interview, I asked the teacher to reflect on how their instruction fits into their vision of teaching. Finally, at the conclusion of the video-guided interview, I asked the

teacher to reflect on any researchable questions or practices that they would like to pursue. Based upon the participating teachers' schedules, needs, and interests, I conducted two video guided interviews with Nora, three interviews with Jon and Leah, and four interviews with Islena.

In piloting the video-guided interview protocol with a preservice teacher, I noted a few observations. The participant responded well to the protocol questions in that they were clear and that the responses fit what I had expected. In particular, the questions helped the teacher to notice critical moments in her instruction, both moments that went well and moments that showed her where she would like to improve. The participant observed that her process of choosing the video segment required lots of thought and reflection, and that the interview pushed on her critical observation skills. As such, when Leah said she would like to have all of her classes video taped for an interview, I suggested that she choose one class that would be most helpful for her to see.

The video-guided interviews were designed to answer research questions one, two and four. In answer to question one, the video-guided interviews provided information about which aspects of their instruction the participants emphasized when provided with this professional learning situation. Tracing their vision of teaching through these interviews provides data for research question two. In addressing the fourth research question, the participants' responses to interview questions and choosing foci was analyzed for its utility as a tool for critical reflection. This will be explained in more detail in the analysis section.

### ***Action: the Coached inquiry project***

The final phase of this study involved the teacher participants in taking an inquiry action toward designing their classrooms in ways guided by their own teaching vision and learning goals. This kind of activity has been named many things by theorists and practitioners alike. Richardson (1994) refers to this process of teachers conducting their own inquiry as "practical

inquiry,” the focus of which is not to create generalizable knowledge, rather, to find “new ways of looking at the context and problem and/or possibilities for changes in practice” (p. 7). She suggests that such research leads to more immediate changes in practice. In the coaching literature, this is part of a coaching cycle (Costa & Garmston, 1994), where the coach and the teacher choose an aspect of the teacher’s instruction as a coaching focus. The coach and the teacher design a data collection technique, which is implemented by the coach, to further understand this aspect of the teacher’s instruction. This observation is followed by a co-determined action to attempt to alter the teacher’s instruction. Further observation and data collection and action create the coaching cycle. This final phase may also be characterized as action research. In education, action research is often typified as a teacher noting an instructional issue that she or he would like to address, designing a project to address the issue, and systematically taking data on the success or failure of the project (Noffke, 2009; Stringer, 2004). In this final phase, I collaborated with the participants in the creation of inquiry projects that addressed specific questions or concerns the participants had about their instruction. Bringing together the relational aspect of coaching with inquiry, I refer to this part of the study as the coached inquiry project.

Although the participants decided the specific aims of the coached inquiry projects, the intent of these projects was to begin to bridge a gap between a teacher’s vision of teaching and their classroom practices. These projects went through three phases. Based on the coaching cycle (Costa & Garmston, 1994), the first phase centered on formulating a question or objective. The second phase encompassed the design and implementation to address that question. The final phase was centered on coaching the participant in reflection on the project.

### ***Formulating questions***

In this study, after in-depth discussions about participants' visions of teaching and learning, as well as in-depth observations and reflections on instruction, participants were given the opportunity to design a project that addressed an instructional issue in their classroom. Following the coaching cycle approach described in much of the coaching literature (e.g. Costa & Garmston 1994; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2010), I collaboratively designed a coached inquiry project with the participating teachers. This began in this first phase with a discussion about what aspect of their instruction they would like to study with the purpose of formulating a question about the participant's classroom (see Appendix E for protocol). For example, Nora was very interested in structuring writing in her classroom in such a way that students would make personal connections and explore their identities. Her question asked, "How can I alter my writing instruction to help more students connect in personal ways?" The theoretical work of Habermas and Mezirow undergird these projects in that I attempted to maintain a setting conducive to communicative action. That means, in this situation, that the projects were focused on the needs and situations of the participants as discerned by the participants, rather than imposed by the coach. My role was primarily to encourage critical reflection, ask questions, and assist the participants in creating an inquiry question whose scope is sufficiently succinct to be addressable in a timeframe where the participants would see the fruits of their labors.

### ***Inquiry project design and implementation***

After formulating the questions for their inquiry, each participant met with the researcher and planned short projects that took place in the participant's classroom to address their question from the previous phase. My role in this final phase was again informed by the coaching

literature (Costa & Garmston 1994; Dozier, 2006, Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2010) in that it primarily focused on asking questions, reflecting, and planning with the teachers. For example, Nora's question about helping her students identify through writing was addressed through planning some writing lessons designed to spark student interest in writing. My role in her project was to assist in devising the writing lessons and observe their implementation and outcomes.

It is important to recognize that the planning and implementation of the coached inquiry project was necessary to the continuity of the research design, despite its interventionist nature. The research questions in this study do not focus on the outcome of these coached inquiry projects; rather, they focus on the decisions and emphases that the teachers place in constructing these projects. As such, although I was intimately involved in the entire process, it is important to recognize that this is still descriptive research.

### ***Reflection***

This final phase of the coached inquiry project focused on reflection. It consisted of a final interview with each of the participants. This interview was similar in some characteristics with the vision of teaching interviews, but with an emphasis on shifts or change in their vision, as well as what the teacher had learned in this study. This interview also asked participants to evaluate each of the different phases of this project in regards to helping them to reflect critically and grow professionally (see Appendix F for protocol).

### **Data collection**

There were many data sources embedded throughout this study. Interview data from the first and last phase was audio recorded and transcribed. A Wordle was created from each participant's responses that described their vision of teaching. Interview data from the video

guided interviews was also audio recorded and transcribed. I took field notes during interactions with the participants as well as of any observations in the second phase of the study. In the final phase, audio recordings of the question formulation and planning process of the coached inquiry projects were taken and transcribed. In total, a little over 50 hours of audiotape was collected in this study. Additionally, artifacts that were produced in the planning were added to the corpus. Finally, throughout the study, I maintained a research journal. This journal was useful for recording own reflections on both the research process and the participation of the participants. See Appendix H for a list of data sources and how they aligned with the research questions.

### ***Observations and field notes***

Considering the emphasis coaching has placed on creating positive relationships between coaches and teachers it was essential that I get to know the teacher/participants and become a part of the teaching context (Costa & Garmston, 1994; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2010). To this end, I either preceded or followed each school visit with some time to observe and participate in the school day. For example, after conducting an interview or meeting on their projects, I stayed in the school for the remainder of the day to observe and assist in what is happening in their classrooms. I spent approximately 21 hours engaged in professional development activities between the four participants, as well as another 12 hours in classroom observations. In addition to these hours, initial and final interviews and other ancillary moments such as meeting the participants in a coffee shop to grade papers added another 14 hours of time spent with the participants. Apart from these hours, I made it a point to eat lunch daily with the participants and the other members of their teams, attended a session of school-sponsored professional development, and chatted with participants during recess observations, in the hallways between classes, and after school. During this time I took field



notes on what I observed, as well as a research journal to record my experiences as a “human instrument” and to provide trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 327). Following the recommendations of Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995), these field notes focused on the teacher’s instructional practices and became part of the corpus of research data.

### ***Research journal and memos***

After interactions with the participants, usually after school, I took the time to journal and write memos about what I observed, questions I had, and thoughts on future directions. There were several purposes to this. The research journal and writing of memos provided a space that, although it was near to the research incidence, it was not in the immediate context like a field note. Memos were more for reflection, questioning, hypothesizing, and planning for next phases in research. These memos became a place for noting thoughts on themes and patterns in the data I was collecting (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995; Bogden & Biklen, 2007).

### **Analysis**

In Appendix H is a chart that maps the relationship between the research questions, the data collection, and the analysis. The primary method of analysis of this data is qualitative coding (Bogden & Biklen, 2007; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Creswell, 2002; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). As I collected data, I wrote memos in the research journal about themes and concepts that correspond to the research questions that needed to be explored in data analysis. The initial interviews with the administrators and teacher participants, the video-guided interviews and their planning interviews, the coached inquiry project planning, and the final interview with the participants all were transcribed and formatted to be used in HyperResearch.

After transcribing the initial vision of teaching interviews, I coded the transcriptions with the code *vision of teaching*, focusing on key words, phrases, and ideas the teachers offered as

descriptions of their vision. I then used the website [www.wordle.net](http://www.wordle.net) to create a graphic representation of the teachers' individual visions of teaching. I used the resulting Wordles to member check with the participating teachers about the accuracy of the representation of their vision. After examining the Wordle, the participants offered detailed feedback about which words were unnecessary, missing, or should be more or less emphasized to more accurately represent their vision of what they would like to ideally happen in the classroom.

The first research question asks about the professional development foci of the participants during this study. To answer that question, I coded the transcripts using Habermas' three categories of constitutive interests to think about on what kinds of knowledge the participants are focusing their attention. I checked the coded transcripts against my research journal and the memos, as well as against field notes looking for triangulation of data and consistency. In particular, responses to the video-guided interview questions and the formulation of an inquiry question provided the best data for the first research question.

The second research question relates to the participants' visions of teaching, how those visions align with their professional development choices, and how the context affects the implementation of their visions. To answer those questions, I coded the transcripts from the initial interview with the teacher participants with the code *vision of teaching*, and then further open-coded those segments with codes that described their vision. I then used codes that described the participants' interests in professional development. Doing an axial comparison between the *vision of teaching* codes and *professional development* codes provided data for this question. I used interview notes from my discussion with the participants about the accuracy of the Wordle representation to further refine my understanding of their vision. In addition, I used

the codes developed in this first segment throughout the corpus of data, which provided additional insights and trustworthiness in describing their vision of teaching.

To analyze data about the professional context, I used interview notes from the interviews with the administrative participants and the additional four teacher interviews to determine dominant themes and characteristics. These notes were useful in determining which parts of the context interviews needed to be transcribed. I then compared the findings from those interviews with my own field notes from discussions with the participants and observations of the setting. I coded the transcripts from the video guided interviews and the coached professional development project and compared those codes (*context, administration, structure*) with the segments coded under the participants' visions of teaching. I was then able trace comments and observations throughout the study that relate to the teacher's vision and relate them to the professional context. The protocols for the video-guided interview and formulating a question for the inquiry section contained specific prompts for discussion of how their vision explicitly relates to the professional development experience.

The third and fourth research questions are more centered on my own experience using the participants' visions of teaching and the video-guided interviews as coaching tools and helping the participants to align their instruction with their vision. To answer these questions, I analyzed my research journal where I took notes on using the vision of teaching and the video-guided interviews as tools. Identifying the central themes from these notes, I re-examined the coded transcripts to triangulate the data. Coding the interviews with *matching vision of teaching* and *does not match vision of teaching* and collating the results provided a basis for examining the alignment between the participants' visions and their observations in the video guided interviews.

One of the purposes of these coaching tools was designed to help engage the teacher in critical reflection. To evaluate their critical reflection when using these coaching tools, I referred to a rubric developed Ward and McCotter (2004) to analyze and break down the teacher's statements according to qualities and dimensions of critical reflection. Although the rubric was designed for preservice teachers, its authors advocate its use for analyzing the critical reflections of teachers who are thinking about their practice. The rubric (Appendix G) is particularly suited for this study in that its break down of the qualitative levels of critical reflection includes a category that fits neatly with Habermas' constitutive interests. Finally, in the last interview with the participants, I asked them to evaluate their own learning from these tools.

Figure 4: Questions, Tools, and Codes

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Research Tools and Codes</b>
1. On what aspects of professional practice do teachers focus when given the opportunity to design their own professional development?	<i>Technical Interests, Practical Interests, Emancipatory Interests</i>
2. How does a teacher’s vision of teaching align with their professional development choices?	<i>Vision of Teaching, professional development interest</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do teachers describe their vision of teaching?</li> </ul>	<i>Vision of Teaching</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the instructional context impact the enactment of the teachers’ vision of teaching?</li> </ul>	Interview notes, field notes, <i>context, administration, structure</i>
3. How might a coach use a teacher’s vision as a coaching tool?	Research Journal, Memos, <i>vision of teaching</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How might a coach help a teacher to align their instruction with their educational vision?</li> </ul>	Research Journal, Memos, <i>matches vision of teaching, does not match vision of teaching</i>
4. How might a coach use video guided interviews as a coaching tool?	Research Journal, Memos

When concerned with outcomes that are mostly focused on understanding and describing processes, the close examination of a case study is an appropriate choice. Case studies allow the researcher to be “responsive, to convey a holistic and dynamically rich account” of educational experiences (Merriam, 1988, p. 30). In particular, Yin (2003) would describe this case study as a single case study with multiple embedded units of analysis. In this research, the case is the

professional development experience set in the context of the school, while the units of analysis comprise the four primary participants.

Following the guidelines set by Yin (2003), Merriam (1988) and Bogden and Biklen (2007) the case was constructed around primarily exploring the professional development experience entailed in this study. Each of the four participants was then considered as unit of analysis that were going through this professional learning experience. Then, these four units of analysis and the case were considered in regard to the context in which they occurred. Each unit of analysis provided different themes that yielded unique insights, and the analysis was organized around those themes. For example, the participants each offered a vision of teaching, and so the primary elements of those visions became the central focus of the construction of the unit of analysis. The four units were then considered in tandem to learn about their common experiences with this study's approach. This cross case analysis served to further explore such themes, find commonalities and differences, and triangulate central ideas.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results**

In this chapter, I share the findings from this study. I have divided the findings by the four different participants, resulting in four units of analysis to explore this case study on professional learning. In addition, there were important findings concerning the professional learning context in which the participants worked, as well as cross-case findings regarding my own experiences coaching with the participants and the video-guided interviews.

#### **Professional Learning at Stetson Middle School**

Through observations and interviewing teachers and administrators at Stetson Middle School several findings relevant to the context of this study became apparent. These findings are important as they form the field in which the participants are experiencing this approach to professional development (Casey, 2006; Mraz, Algozzine, & Watson, 2008; Ippolito, 2010; Steckel, 2009; Walpole & Blamey, 2008; Webster-Wright, 2009). In this section I describe the professional learning culture and situation at Stetson Middle School.

When discussing the school's administration, teachers were invariably positive. In fact, two of the teachers interviewed for this study came to Stetson Middle School because they had a prior relationship with the principal and desired to continue to work in his school. Teachers generally felt that they were supported by the administration, and that they were given the latitude to improve their teaching skills or try new things. On the administration's part, the principal spoke highly of the teachers at the school and highlighted the importance of creating a positive and supportive learning environment for both the students and the teachers. He felt confident that he could trust the professionalism of the teachers in encouraging them to innovate in their teaching. Echoing this sentiment, the vice-principal stated that as long as teachers are

teaching the standards, they would be supported in their professional endeavors. The principal at Stetson Middle School has created a school leadership team, which has teacher representatives from the different content areas represented at the school. This school leadership team advises the administration and helps make decisions about the direction professional learning at the school. At this level, teachers expressed concerns about their professional interests not being represented well by their representative. In particular, several of the teachers felt that the person representing their content area on the school leadership team represented a different approach to teaching, and that they did not adequately represent their needs and concerns.

Teachers are required by the district to earn 30 points of professional development each year, which translates to thirty hours. In years past, the district provided a menu of options for professional development workshops from which teachers could choose. Several participants spoke highly of a technology workshop the district organized the previous year, and noted that they were even able to buy some of the technology that was presented. This year, due to budget cuts, the district narrowed the professional development to two programs, Battelle and Quantum Learning. Quantum Learning is an instructional approach that focuses on teaching methods, student engagement, and life skills. Battelle is an online professional development regimen that offers teachers guided workshops on a wide range of topics. The principal of Stetson, considering the advice of the school leadership team, asked the teachers to complete the Battelle workshops on formative assessment in groups. The teachers then were able to choose from the menu of choices other workshops they could complete to finish their 30 points of professional development. These other options included a variety of workshops such as on using data to guide instruction, how to read test data, and how to use a graphic organizer.



The intent of the administration was that while teachers would be doing the Battelle workshops in small groups, they would also have discussions about how to apply what they were learning. These groups met over the summer, and, according to the returning teachers, they had fruitful discussions about formative assessment. Several of the teachers indicated that the Battelle workshop had made them think about experimenting with various types of assessment, although none could give a specific example of them actually implementing something new due to the workshop. For teachers who were not hired until later or who could not attend the summer professional development, the school administration put them in their own group to complete the Battelle workshops over the school year.

One participant in this new group felt disappointed that the other members of the group did not want to discuss the workshops, despite her attempts to engage them. I observed this group while at Stetson to see what the online workshops were like, as well as to understand the professional development experience from the teachers' perspectives. As the teachers sat together to choose which workshops they would try, their discussion focused on which workshops required the least amount of time for the number of professional development points they would receive. They settled on a workshop that focused on interpreting the test results from the school's Orchard standardized tests. The workshop began with a short video introduction and discussion about the Orchard feedback on reading and math scores. It then showed a group of teacher avatars discussing and reviewing the information. Finally, the workshop ended with a series of multiple-choice tests that the teachers collaboratively answered. When the teachers chose a wrong answer, the Battelle program would ask them to choose again. Teacher discussion during this process was mostly centered on getting the right answer so that they could get the workshop done quickly.

At Stetson Junior, there are several important ideas that teachers expressed concerning professional development. In interviews and discussions, teachers positioned professional development as a formal activity usually organized and guided by someone else. For example, when discussing the four teacher work days built into the school calendar for teachers to complete their 30 professional development points, teacher participants stated that very few people do their mandated professional development hours on those days because their professional development is “finished” and that “Most people choose not to do anything that day.” This signifies that teachers are envisioning professional development as a contained event that has a beginning and an end when administrators are mandating it. When discussing professional development, participants were nearly universal in using the words “useful” or “practical” to describe the ideal professional development.

In contrast, when prompted to think about how they learn to teach rather than professional development, teachers provided different responses. Teachers spoke about learning from their colleagues, particularly those who are on the same grade level. In particular, the teachers on the seventh grade team claimed to learn from their colleagues during lunch and while supervising students at recess. In these settings, I observed teachers talking about troublesome students, planning for group projects, and philosophical discussions about education, in addition to friendly banter and social chatting, providing a very different atmosphere than when they were focused on mandated professional development.

Three participants from this seventh grade team actually receive professional development points for working together to layer the English, reading, and special education curricula. They meet regularly after school to discuss their instructional plans and assessments. I observed and was informed about how the teachers actively plan, assess, and align lessons with

each other, discussing the strengths and needs of different groups of students. For example, Nora and Leah meet regularly with one of the special education teachers to plan differentiated instruction for the students with special needs. However, these kinds of activities are not the first things the teachers think about when they are asked about professional development. Only when prompted do the teachers refer to such activities as professional development. Instead, formal workshops and formal programmatic elements are what the teachers at Stetson Middle School think of when discussing professional development.

### **Units of Analysis**

Results regarding the first two research questions in this study are best understood on a case level basis. Therefore, for each of the four participants, I built a case that shares findings about their professional development choices and their visions of teaching. To complete the case, I have described other relevant details and contextual information about each of the participants.

#### **Leah**

Leah is a case of a teacher who embraces this professional development experience as a means to engage with the practical and technical interests in her vision of teaching. Leah also engages with emancipatory interests, but outside of the more formal professional learning setting. Leah envisions herself as a facilitator who opens up possibilities and choices for her students.

Leah grew up as a preacher's daughter in Kentucky. She describes herself as an acceptable student who enjoyed the social aspects of schooling, but not as a student who was driven. She completed both her undergraduate degree and a master's degree in education at a small, private religious university in Arkansas. Inspired by a drive to help people, Leah originally began her studies as a nursing student, but switched to education thinking that it would

be the best career in which she could “make a difference.” Leah initially taught elementary school in Arkansas, where she used a Reading First approach to teaching her students to read. After four years in the elementary setting, she decided that she wanted to teach older kids and be nearer to some family members, so she moved to Tennessee and found a job at Stetson Junior, where she has taught seventh grade reading for two years.

An important moment in Leah’s teacher preparation came while she was taking a required adolescent literature class for her master’s degree. The professor expected the students to read a large amount of young adult literature for the course. Leah admitted to the professor that she was not a strong reader, and that she disliked reading. The professor convinced her to give reading a chance, promising to help her choose books that would “hook” her onto reading. The professor helped Leah to recognize that her lackluster reading had resulted in her having a weak vocabulary as well as being a poor writer. He gave her a three book series starting with Everest, by Gordon Korman, and Leah was hooked on reading. This has become a significant event for Leah as she aspires to provide similar experiences for her students.

Although Leah has only been at Stetson Junior for two years, colleagues who teach in the same hallway refer to her as the “hallway leader” of the seventh grade. The other teachers use the term in a joking manner, but in some aspects she admits that the moniker is appropriate. Leah generates and coordinates many of the ideas and suggestions that are taken up by the other teachers on her team. For example, at the beginning of the school year, Leah took the initiative to arrange for everyone on the seventh grade team to receive a copy of *How to Teach Reading When You’re Not a Reading Teacher* (Faber, 2004) to help her colleagues with reading instruction.

### *Vision of teaching*

When discussing her vision of teaching, Leah emphasized the role she wants her teaching to have in creating new opportunities for her students. She wants her students to have a greater range of choices in their lives and recognize that there are choices in the world that may not be represented in their community. Speaking of her own upbringing, many students in her hometown did not recognize the options they had in life. In the interview, she justified her decision to become a teacher as “a place to reach people, a place to touch people, a place to be able to show people a different way that you can be or to help you along the path you’re already in would be the classroom, where you have young minds and young thoughts and a place to show them either something different or at least open up the world or different views to my kids.” This part of Leah’s vision is also related to her desire for her students to become “productive people in society,” which she defines as someone who knows their options and choices, and chooses the way in which they want to be successful. Leah presented a very nurturing and humanistic approach to teaching, perhaps shaped by her religious upbringing.

Later, Leah added that she wants her students to recognize that they “have options” and that “somebody who isn’t necessarily environmentally have the best growing up, you don’t have the most money, but you have a choice.” Concerned about the insular setting in which many of her students live, Leah envisions herself expanding the worlds of her students. Reflecting on herself, Leah stated, “I’m an educated person, and my choices aren’t limited to what my environment allows for me. My choices are limited to what I can think” As part of her vision of teaching, Leah identifies that the key to helping open up her students to new possibilities is for them to engage in critical thinking and in logic. Leah identified that pushing students’ thinking is important to her vision of teaching. She chooses books that help students question their core

beliefs. For example, Leah said that when reading about the holocaust, she pushes students to question their own prejudices rather than just remark on the historical atrocity. However, although Leah presented herself as someone who was very concerned with critical thinking, that critical thinking did not appear to include much about the larger societal roles, structures, and pressures that exist in the lifeworlds of her students. Rather, they were mostly concerned with making choices on an individual level and struggles within individual family units.

A central aspect of Leah's vision of teaching is a strong emphasis on the practical purposes to teaching. She stated that if "I just give them information, rote memory stuff they can memorize; I don't really care if they know what an adverb or comma is, I care if they can effectively communicate in an interview with somebody to where they can get a job that they want." In talking about learning to read, she felt that the important aspect of reading was that her students learn "what reading can do for you" more than adopting her passion for reading. Leah identifies three practical reasons, from her own experience, that she views are important for students to become good readers. She says that she wants her students to be good readers because it supports their vocabulary development, helps them be better writers, and they may enjoy it. In consideration of some of her other vision statements, these reasons emphasize a utilitarian approach to reading that suggests Leah's vision is more focused on the practical benefits of education rather than the philosophical benefits of education.

Leah claims in her vision that her role is more of a "facilitator" who "help(s) (students) discover by leading them in certain directions." This means that she hopes to create spaces where students do their own thinking and questioning. Leah stated:

I feel like I don't want to be the information giver all the time. I want to be the one that encourages you to find the information on your own. But because that's my goal, I feel

like I have to move them faster because we have so much. It's that struggle of not doing it for them and letting them do it but still being on that crunch of time and I don't know, length of time to do things.

Leah's aspirations to be a facilitator is echoed in her role with students as someone who helps them pick out good books that might inspire a love of reading, meaning that she provides the suggestions that inspire the students' growth.

When looking at her original Wordle, Leah commented that she liked how the word *reading* was so big. However, if she taught another subject, then that word would probably be replaced with *learning*. She noted that the words *learning*, *learner* and *facilitator* should appear bigger on the Wordle to more accurately represent her vision of having a learner- or student-centered classroom where she is just the facilitator.

When discussing her vision of teaching, Leah identified one of her weaknesses as an obstacle to her vision. In talking about wanting her students to monitor their own learning, Leah conceded, "I just wish that I would learn, and maybe that's just growth I need to learn as a teacher. Just shut up and let your kids do it. And that's hard because it's less control for me, and I recognize that. It's less control for me, and it's less of me knowing the direction it's going to go with some type of certainty." Leah recognized that she tries to hurry her students through the learning objectives of her class, and that stands in the way of letting them monitor their own thinking as well as to develop deep thoughts and connections to the content.

The press for time and coverage is so great in Leah's mind that it contributes to her not realizing her vision of teaching. When talking about this press, Leah stated:

... sometimes I work against myself. One of my goals is for [the students] to discover things and to have choices, and one of my goals is to give them opportunity and to help them be thinkers and to help them be readers. I think that in trying to work so hard at that goal I kind of passed up some of those things. I almost can't see the forest for the trees. I'm working so hard at the individual things but am I really seeing it manifest itself in my classroom.

Although she railed against what she sees as a “factory assembly line type of mentality” where students “come on in, sit down, let me give it all out to you and move on” approach to teaching, Leah conceded that she falls into the trap of not allowing her students the time and space to think through and respond to what she is teaching. Although Leah likes to think of herself as a facilitator of learning, that role was often sidelined by her perceived lack of time. As a result, she had a habit of finishing her students' sentences and thoughts for them in her hurry. Although Leah stated that she was aware of this conflict between her beliefs about teaching and her context, the construction of the hurry was taken for granted and not questioned.

When talking about the difficulties of teaching, Leah discussed her mixed feelings about standardized tests and instruction. When asked about the standards, she said, “I choose what I teach. I just have the standards, and I choose when I teach and how I teach.” Momentarily and visibly stunned by my question about the adequacy of the standards to mesh with her beliefs about giving students options, Leah decided that she makes the standards mesh with what she wants to teach, but still was shaken by the thought that standards might not always represent what she might think is best for students. Leah noted that if standards become more top-down with pacing guides due to low test scores, she plans on just taking what they give her and “make



it meaningful” to students. Her unease provides further evidence that Leah’s critical thinking was best described as pragmatic, and not questioning of bigger authoritarian structures.

An example of Leah’s complicated views of standardized testing occurred when discussing an instructional moment where a typically unengaged student suddenly became interested in a topic she was presenting. Leah relayed:

He comes up afterward and he was like, ‘What’s that website? I want to go try that.’ And maybe that’s his talent. Maybe that’s something in life that he’s never discovered, and he gets to discover that now...that’s what I want for my kids. That’s the kind of thing that I want to inspire in them. I just wished it looked the same way on a standardized test as it does in my classroom.

That the most motivating or interesting aspects of instruction are not represented well on the standardized tests was a common theme for lunchtime discussions as well as reflections on teaching with Leah, yet this critique did not extend to the point of questioning the role of standardized testing, merely what was on the tests. This incident precipitated a change in our discussions, as Leah began to ask more questions about the inherent difficulties present in school structures with further questioning about who made and makes curricular decisions for schools.

When discussing obstacles to her vision of teaching, Leah highlighted “a learning gap” and a “gap of knowledge already” that characterized her students. She then borrowed an image from a story I had told her earlier about my daughter borrowing my wrenches and fixing her bike unassisted. She described her students as riding around on a broken bike, and not knowing how to fix it, what a wrench was, or how a bike was even designed to work. Referring to the intractable nature of this issue, she felt she needed to convince her students that it is worthwhile

to fix the bike and learn to ride, but there is too big of a gap. Leah wondered if it would be better to go back to the students' kindergarten experiences or even with the students' parents to show them how to fix the bike.

During the video-guided interviews, Leah identified aspects of her teaching that both mirror and run contrary to her vision of teaching. Although the video was not necessary for this, Leah noted that the authentic texts she was using with her students, such as job applications, closely aligned with her practical vision of teaching. She also was encouraged when she observed students successfully working in small groups on identifying and understanding non-fiction text types. The conversations she heard on tape provided evidence that the students were constructing their own understandings of the content and asking questions that lead to "discovery learning."

Although it was not strongly evident in the initial interviews about Leah's vision of teaching, as we watched videos of her instruction, Leah noted that metacognition and self-awareness are important to her teaching. Acknowledging that this is an important aspect of learning, Leah remarked, "I'm all about the self-awareness, reflection type of thing. So if they can't even recognize what they already know how are they doing to learn something new? You have to have something to connect it to." While this certainly can be tied into Leah's desire for her students to expand their horizons, her recognition of the role of metacognition and self-awareness represent a deepening of her self-understanding and provides evidence that she was becoming more critical of her work as a teacher.

However, she observed in her teaching a practice that did not align with her vision. She noted that in discussions with the class, that she often rushed students in their answers, and would even finish their answers for them. This became a central concern for Leah, as she valued

opportunities for students to think deeply and metacognitively. Leah noted that she sometimes “works against herself” in her teaching in between making sure students receive everything she is required to teach and her desire to teach according to her vision. She noted,

That’s what the tension is. I feel like I don’t want to be the information giver all the time. I want to be the one that encourages you to find the information on your own. But because that’s my goal, I feel like I have to move them faster because we have so much. It’s that struggle of not doing it for them and letting them do it but still being on that crunch of time and I don’t know, length of time to do things.

The tension between getting through the curriculum, keeping the class moving at a quick pace, and creating a space where students have time to think through the curriculum and find information is a central struggle for Leah.

In addition, Leah noticed that with the fluid nature of the classroom there are many choices to be made about where the learning could move. Contrary to her vision of teaching in which she is a facilitator of learning, Leah noted that she is the one who makes all the decisions about how learning is accomplished in the classroom. Leah felt that there needed to be a way for students to make decisions about the direction of the classroom learning.

### ***Professional learning foci***

Leah brought up a number of ideas in our interviews for professional learning that mostly fit into Habermas’ practical and technical constitutive knowledges. Her ideas for professional learning fit well with her pragmatic vision of teaching. Although it was outside of the more formalized professional learning spaces such as the observations and interviews, Leah also engaged in emancipatory interests with her colleagues.

In discussing a professional learning project she would be interested in being coached, Leah was primarily concerned about her pattern of rushing students and finishing their thoughts for them. She took this idea a little further when she noticed that her teaching more closely matches her vision when, instead of merely acknowledging a student response to her question, she asks the student to expound or to give an example of what they are trying to say. Leah states that it is her desire to get through the content in a timely manner that compels her to abbreviate her students' participation in such discussions. From this point of view, this professional learning interest fits both the practical and the technical aspects of Habermas' theory. It is technical in that Leah wanted to learn how to better manage the classroom around student learning. It is practical in that it begins to broach the social norms and expectations of her classroom as well as the roles she and her students take. Indeed, this could potentially be a seed of emancipatory learning if it were followed through to recognition and reconceptualization of the differentials of power and learning between her and her students.

However, Leah felt unsure about how I could help her with this concern; she thought that merely noting the pattern and planning more time for discussion would solve the problem. Therefore, she decided that instead she wanted my help in planning her unit on non-fiction text types. She wanted her students to be better readers of non-fiction text, and chose to focus on teaching text types with their requisite key words, structures, and graphic organizers. I helped Leah find some brief descriptions of different text types as well as student-friendly examples of the different text types. As we talked about what she wanted her students to learn from these lessons, we decided that I would rewrite a chronological text type (a recipe for fudge) using a problem/solution text type to highlight why an author would be careful in choosing a particular

text type. Leah's project topic is a highly technical interest that is governed by her desire for her to teach her students to become more adept at reading a particular type of text.

At the conclusion of a day of interviewing and observing students, I stopped by Leah's classroom for a friendly chat. Nora was there, and we began to discuss the many ways that teachers are losing their power to make instructional decisions for their students. Leah and Nora felt that they were under so much pressure by tests and curricular demands, that time for going deeper into content and thinking was pushed aside. This discussion yielded the phrase, "take back the profession" where Nora and Leah felt that teachers needed to be the people in charge of the teaching profession, deciding what it meant to become a teacher, to be a good teacher, as well as to keep the professional responsibility for making instructional decisions in their classroom.

This conversation, which continued throughout my time at Stetson Middle School, represented a push towards emancipatory interests. Rather than just focusing on details of how they could better instruct their students, they recognized and spoke back against some of the larger structural issues (e.g. standardized testing, curriculum guides, teacher education testing, time issues) that they felt were impinging on their professionalism and their practice. Instead of thinking of themselves in merely the classroom context, they shifted their discussion to a broader political and social context where faceless policy makers were impacting their lives. That this conversation began after school, and was continued during lunch times and while supervising students playing at recess, is perhaps unsurprising because such spaces are not the traditional spaces of professional learning. In other words, the teachers had to leave the immediate and constrained classroom context to take a broader view of the role of the larger context.

### *Coaching Leah*

As a coach, I found Leah's concerns about finishing her students' thoughts compelling and a possible fulcrum to leverage professional learning. However, although Leah was clear in how this practice was not fulfilling her vision, she seemed reticent to address the issue directly. She preferred an indirect approach of having a well-planned unit where she would not feel quite so pressured by time to cut off her students' thinking. Leah concluded that this was an aspect of her teaching of which she just needed to become more aware, and then she would be able to improve on it.

In contrast to the ideals Leah expressed in her vision of teaching, some aspects I observed while coaching seemed contrary to the way she valued thinking and application. For example, her students were memorizing William Blake's poem, The Tyger. The class would chorally repeat the poem, practicing the cadences and pronunciation. In a discussion with Leah, I asked about this activity. Leah spoke about the importance of oral fluency to being a good reader, but when pressed, admitted that her students did not likely understand the poem, nor had she spent much class time on comprehending its meaning. Leah's emphasis on fluency, which she learned at a Reading First program and practiced while teaching at an elementary school, was evident in several of her discussions with me. She repeatedly talked about tracking her students' fluency rates and how improving them was one of her primary instructional goals. Recognizing that tracking and measuring reading fluency is more straightforward than doing the same with reading comprehension, this emphasis on fluency echoes Leah's strong bent to the practical aspects of teaching and Habermas' technical constitutive interests.

While not opposed to improving reading fluency, it appeared to me that improving their reading comprehension was more in line with Leah's vision of facilitating her students'

understanding of what “reading could do for them.” Therefore, reading comprehension became the fulcrum on which I centered with Leah. As such, when I was in coaching situations with Leah and she brought up fluency, I would push her thinking about her students’ reading and ask about their reading comprehension. By the end of our time together, Leah would talk about fluency and add, “which includes comprehension” to her descriptions of her students’ reading.

### **Jon**

There are several findings that the example of Jon, a pseudonym, represents. Jon is a case of a teacher who did not readily embrace change. From the beginning, his vision of teaching was very focused on pragmatic descriptions of teaching methods that were already closely aligned to the way he was already teaching. I theorize that this is a case where the coaching did not sufficiently leverage the vision of teaching to deepen reflection or engage in emancipatory interests.

Jon did not start out intending to become a teacher. After high school, he joined the coast guard, where he served for seven years. When it came time to decide about re-enlisting, his wife was pregnant with their first child. Coming from a family of teachers, Jon and his wife jointly decided that he should pursue a career in teaching, as it would be a good lifestyle for raising a family. In choosing a subject area, Jon stated that he flipped a coin between social studies and science, choosing history because he had history teachers who made it “come alive,” meaning they never made students memorize dates but instead focused on conceptual understanding.

In his sixth year at Stetson Middle School, Jon is the seventh grade social studies teacher as well as the football coach. He adamantly insists; however, that he is “a teacher first,” signifying his opposition to the stereotype of the coach who also has to teach courses. He provides two examples of what he sees his unique role in this school to be. In a school where

most of the teachers are female, Jon expressed strong beliefs that he needs to be a good role model for the male students as well as a father figure, embodying the ethical and regulative aspects of teaching and learning:

I also know that a lot of these either don't have a male role model in their life or it's not the best male role model in their life. And I know I play dad. I am dad. I tell them at the beginning of the year, "I'll treat you just like you're my kid, cause when you're in here, you are my kid. Period. You're mine." And that's how I look at them. I look at them all as if they're my kids.... but the one big thing is they know I'm the adult. I'm not their friend; I'm not their buddy, but I can be that dad figure. I can be that this is how a man should treat other adults' children. I can be that positive male role model for them. I've had several of them tell me that. They've said, "You're the dad I don't have." And I appreciate that.

Taking a paternalistic stance toward his students was evident in my observations of Jon's interactions with them. I observed him both taking a buddy role and a teacher role as he encouraged students to do better in school, particularly as he encouraged members of his football team. His mannerisms in the classroom evinced an easy going and fun atmosphere. In class, students felt free to call out questions that may or may not be centered on the current learning task.

In addition to thinking of himself as a male role model, Jon's story includes having what he describes as a "major learning disability... a type of dyslexia." This learning disability has made reading, writing, and spelling difficult for Jon. In his teaching, he struggles in writing with conventional spelling on the whiteboard. Jon says he uses this background to try to inspire his students to work hard to overcome the problems they face. He reports that he also uses this



experience as an inspiration to try new teaching methods in the classroom to help students who struggle. He tells his students, “Guys, I understand there are different ways to learn stuff. And just because you’re hitting a brick wall trying to learn it this way, I may know another, because I was there too. I may personally know of other ways to get around that brick wall. And I can help you if you come to me.” Identifying alternative ways for students to learn his subject is a role that Jon identifies as important to him. Clearly, Jon identifies his role at Stetson Middle School as more than just a teacher.

### ***Vision of teaching***

In interviews with Jon about his vision of teaching, I identified several themes that dominated his discussions of teaching. These themes include making history real, productive citizenship, questioning, and retaining information. Although these themes are present in his discussion, there exists a tension between his discussion and his practice that provides a place where a coach could leverage some professional learning. However, this space goes largely unnoticed by Jon.

Jon models his vision of instruction after some appealing history courses he took in grade school where the teacher, “...made it real to the student. It wasn’t just memorized dates and facts and names. It’s ‘Well, why is that name important? Why is that name important? Why should I even care?’” He describes this approach to teaching as “Make it real, make it a discovery.” Jon says he does this by using video clips and multimedia to make places and cultures real to students. For Jon, the concept of discovery was essential to his vision of teaching. While observing himself leading a lecture where several of the students asked him questions, he noted “To me, that is, again, we’re getting discovery, because we’re seeing what people know. We’re not reading it out of a book. We’re pulling from memory. What do we know? We’re trying to tie

it in to other life experiences. To me it's a safe environment." These two ideas, that of a focusing on concepts instead of facts and connecting to what students already know, describe Jon's approach to discovery.

When asked about the most important ideas that he wants his students to gain from his teaching, Jon spoke about being a productive citizen and engaging in critical thinking. In his mind, these two ideas are linked, "Cause to me, to be truly productive, you need to be able to think critically. That may not go hand in hand in reality, but to me that does." Jon's vision of a productive citizen is a very pragmatic vision that centers on the students' future employment needs. He stated, "You have an IEP here in school, you don't have it when you get out in the workforce. You have to learn how to overcome your disability so you can be productive." Jon's vision of students growing into productive citizens who are ready for employment and are critical thinkers are central themes to his vision of teaching.

Jon's content area emphasizes learning about culture and people, and Jon envisions his students learning to "understand" and "deal with" people with different cultural backgrounds. Tied into his preferred leading lecture format, he believes that student questioning is the key to gaining this understanding. While observing a video of his teaching, Jon noted that when students ask questions about the content, even if it takes the class off course, that this matches his vision of teaching. In interview, Jon stated that he feels it is important that he pushes on student thinking by asking them questions such as "why do you think that?" to further develop their understanding of culture.

When looking over the vision of teaching Wordle created from the first interview, Jon noted that the word *retain* should be on there. Jon felt that in his vision not only did he want his students to learn, but also he wanted them to remember what they learned. He noted with pride

the moments that students would return years later to talk about what they learned in his class many years prior. He also stated that he felt that it was important to prepare his students for eighth grade and beyond. His students needed to retain what they were learning in his class to be prepared for future schooling.

Jon's vision of teaching was more focused on the actual doing of teaching than was the other participants'. For example, in his vision he talked about his focus on vocabulary words as an important thing for students to retain. Part of his vision included watching the textbook's video with students, allowing them to ask questions while watching. He said this fits into his vision because it helps kids get an image in their head that would be easy to retain and connect with. Jon states that this is important because it leads to "really good questions" such as why the elephants in India are different from the elephants in Africa. Jon feels this is good because it lets him tie in the role of the environment in lives of animals and humans.

When talking about his vision of teaching during the first interview, Jon focused heavily on the teaching methods that he felt best suited his vision. In describing his ideal method of teaching, Jon uses the terms "open lecture" or "leading lecture" to describe what he prefers. His tone acknowledging that lecture is not highly valued in education, he conceded:

I do a lot of lecture, but again, it's a leading lecture. I'm wanting questions. I'm wanting conversation. I have a very loud class. I often have extra conversations going on in the classroom. And I can hear, not specifics, but I can hear roughly 90% of what goes on. As long as they're not talking about what happened last night or last week, as long as it's on topic, they can talk all they want. And actually, I encourage that. Cause I know if they're talking with each other, they're learning. If they're talking with each other a lot of times they're asking each other questions that they don't feel comfortable asking the class. And

a lot of times what I'll see is two or three or maybe four will be talking, and all of a sudden a hand will go up out of that group. They've tried to figure it out; they can't, so the boldest one in the group will ask the question. And if I didn't allow any talking, now I've only got one kid that's going to ask the question, if he even thought of the question. He characterizes a "leading lecture" as a lecture where he provides key notes on the board and encourages students to ask questions. Jon spoke a little defensively about his open lectures, recognizing that lectures are not typically thought of as an effective instructional method. Jon describes these lectures as "interactive" in that he encourages students to ask questions about the lecture. While looking at the Wordle of Jon's interview, he said that he would like the word *interactive* to be larger because it represents an important aspect of his vision of teaching. In Jon's mind, it is through interaction between the teacher and the student that students learn best.

During the third video-guided interview, Jon stated that this style of open lecture is particularly important to helping students learn geography. After watching a video of his teaching where his lecture was more about the history of the British Isles than their geography, he recognized that the flow of the lecture was very slow and halting. Coupled with a conversation he had had with another history teacher, Jon created a theory that history should be taught with a lecture followed by discussion, while geography should have the discussion embedded in the lecture.

While visiting with Jon before video recording his class, Jon told me how much he liked to discuss issues with students that were "gray." He felt that helping his students become productive citizens and critical thinkers meant he needed to engage them in topics to which a right or wrong answer was not apparent. Discussing the gray, in Jon's view, was an important

element of his vision of teaching. However, Jon felt he had few opportunities to discuss gray issues because his students were lacking in basic knowledge about important issues.

Yet while video recording the lesson that followed our discussion, Jon had an ideal opportunity to discuss a gray issue. Jon was delivering a leading lecture about the geography and history of Russia, describing the 20<sup>th</sup> century history of Russia and its relationship to the West in terms of bad guys and good guys. A student raised his hand and asked if the United States was always the good guy. Jon responded by saying that was an interesting question, but continued with his lecture, leaving the gray question unexplored.

While engaged in the video-guided interview with Jon on this lesson, Jon did not mention this incident. I later asked Jon about this incident, reminding him of his vision that included discussing the gray, productive citizenry, and critical thinking. He paternalistically responded that he was glad that the student asked the question, but he felt that his students were not ready for that kind of discussion. Such discussions required a maturity that his students did not have. This may be seen as an important insight into Jon's vision of his role as a teacher. There are, perhaps, many things that Jon would like to do with his students, but they are not prepared for such experiences. As a result, Jon is left with lecturing them.

During the video-guided interviews, Jon noted several of his practices that he felt mirrored his vision of teaching. In particular, he was pleased when students asked questions that spurred tangents on topics relevant to the class. He stated that he liked such questions, "Cause obviously that means not only are they retaining the knowledge, but now they're applying the knowledge that they retained." He also liked when he saw himself using videos, because the videos helped students build on the visual images. Anytime students engaged in group work or group discussions were moments that mirrored his vision of teaching. Finally, Jon noted that the

moments when students connected what they were learning in class to familiar ideas reflected his vision in that they were applying what they had learned and were likely to retain what they had learned.

In contrast, while watching videos of his teaching, Jon identified several things that do not align with his vision of teaching. For example, he identified that although he sees himself interacting with the students and that he likes those discussions, he does not see the students interacting and learning from each other. He does a couple of projects through the year where students engaged in their own research, but he noted that most of the time there is little discovery throughout the lesson. While observing the video, Jon noted that the amount of interaction between him and the students varied throughout the lesson. Jon theorized that students talked less and asked fewer questions as the topics became harder. He supposed that this is due to a lack of background knowledge, so he felt that providing more lecture was the most appropriate response.

### Obstacles

When asked about obstacles to his vision of teaching, Jon's responses focused on insufficient access to technology, the home situations of his students and the impact that has had on their schooling. He described, "A large number of our students do not have that family, that home support. You can do your dance, you can do your spiel up here, and once they get home, who knows what they're doing. So you don't have that support, you don't have that back up there." When asked about which obstacle created the largest gap between his current teaching and his vision of teaching, Jon noted, "One of the biggest gaps I see...is the lack of basic skills. A lot of our kids have a lack in basic English skills, a lack in back math skills, and with those...I mean, just for example, my inclusion class cannot read this textbook. They can't do it. It just

doesn't happen." Jon's statements about his students and their homes belie a vision of teaching where the students themselves and their background experiences are the obstacles.

### *Professional learning foci*

Throughout the time spent with Jon, he expressed interest in professional learning. Most of the topics he suggested align most closely with Habermas' technical interests. For example, when talking about his vision of teaching, Jon mentioned, "I would love to do more research, more hands on research. I would love to pose a question or, I would love to just be able to pose a question about an area were studying or the group of people that were studying and have them [students] find out things about them and then report that to the class." Jon's desire to have his students do more research and then discuss their findings during class represents a switch from his typical model of lecturing and discussing the lecture. Yet, having observed some of the research projects done in advanced classes, Jon's sense of research does not align with historical modes of reasoning, and more closely resembled paraphrasing and reconstructing information from secondary sources. As such, this does not represent an emancipatory interest, as it is not a disruption in Jon's beliefs and perceptions of learning and his role in that.

For the third video guided interview, I recorded a class where Jon was teaching about the history and geography of the United Kingdom. His instruction consisted mainly of his typical "open lecture" where he tells the students what he knows about the subject, draws a concept map on the board, and encourages questions. However, according to Jon, this particular lesson had a problem with flow. There was little interaction, and the pacing felt slow and laborious. In the interview, Jon began by stating his displeasure with the lesson and the flow. Observing the recorded lesson had bothered him, and he had come up with a theory of why the lesson did not work for him. He had recently been observed by a very successful history teacher in the district

who was struggling with teaching geography, according to teacher ratings on the state assessments. Jon relayed that he and this teacher decided that teaching history works better when students are lectured followed by the discussion. They decided that geography is more of a social studies topic that is taught better with having a discussion interspersed through the lecture.

Acknowledging that the lesson was a “little slow” and “unfocused,” Jon theorized that the main problem with the lesson he taught was that it centered on the history of the United Kingdom, and so he should have saved the discussion for the end. This moment is interesting to analyze in that it revealed Jon’s strong bent toward focusing on Habermas’ technical interests. When Jon identified that there was a problem with the lesson, he focused on aspects such as delivery and timing, both of which could be considered technical interests. What he did not focus on was the students’ relationships to the content or their relationship to the teaching methods, which may be more of a practical interest, nor to the broader social and political structures that determine his curriculum, which may be more of an emancipatory interest.

Another practical interest that Jon identified was connected to the professional development on assessment he participated in over the summer. He felt that the way he was assessing students worked well for grading purposes “I realized I like my assessments, but my students aren’t assessing themselves.” Wanting his students to learn to assess their own learning represents a shift in thinking about assessment. Jon’s current form of assessment focused on justifying grades and evaluating learning, rather than on helping students to assess their own thinking.

Jon expressed interest in expanding what it means to have an interactive classroom. We discussed how most of the interactions were between him and the students, and that little of the interaction took place between students. Reflecting both practical and technical interests, Jon



wanted to have his students build upon each other's comments during discussions. However, it should be noted that this building upon each other's comments did not necessarily entail questioning the curriculum, rather helping each other arrive at the predetermined destination together.

When asked about the primary obstacle to his vision of teaching, Jon identified his students' weak reading and math skills as inhibiting their learning. He stated that the textbook was too difficult for most of his students to read. As such, he wanted to design a professional development project that would help his students be better readers of the seventh grade textbook. We started the project with Jon having the students take note of the titles and subtitles within the text and turning them into questions. He instructed the students to think about these questions while they read, and check their comprehension as they attempted to answer the questions.

As the students were already learning about writing non-fiction texts in the English classes and the types of non-fiction text in their reading class, we decided to piggy back on this and focus on the various types of text found within the students' textbooks. As the coach, I found two online resources that were written to be friendly to teachers whose specialties are not reading about the different text types and how they might be taught to students. I also collected a number of graphic organizers that Jon would be able to use with his students as they encountered each type of non-fiction text. Finally, I read through the three chapters of text on the state's geography that the students would be reading and marked them according to their text type.

As Jon and I met to discuss the project, I shared the resources I found with him. We discussed the various text types and I showed him the graphic organizers that accompanied them. We looked through the textbook and talked about how the authors were using the various types of text. Jon took this experience and used it to help his students in the classroom. As the class

read the next few chapters, Jon had discussions with the class about not only the text's meaning, but also the ways in which the authors constructed the text. Jon had the students use the graphic organizers to record what they were reading.

### ***Coaching Jon***

As a coach, I struggled with how to disrupt Jon's self-fulfilling beliefs about the inadequacies of his students. While talking about his vision of teaching, he often resorted to describing his method of teaching as being his vision of how it should be done, leaving little space for critique or growth. He observed that his vision, "kind of goes along with the way I normally teach." In fact, at the final interview, Jon remarked that his teaching closely resembles his vision. However, from my perspective, Jon's vision of creating a productive citizenry who engage in critical thinking was difficult to see in actual practice.

As a coach, it was an interesting moment when Jon recognized that his lesson did not proceed as he had hoped. I was pleased that Jon observed both that the lesson did not go well, and that flow was part of the problem. I was also pleased that he was creating local theories about teaching to address the problem. However, from my observation, the flow problems of the lesson stemmed from an insufficient amount of goal-oriented content delivered slowly with few good hooks to arouse student interest. Jon did not share any overarching purpose with the students as to why they might be interested in the subject. Students appeared to be uninvolved, and, per usual, only a handful of the students participated in discussion.

Noting that part of Jon's vision was to have students learn through interaction, and that Jon valued his interactions with his students, I chose this as a fulcrum for change. While watching videos of his instruction, I asked Jon about the kinds of interactions he was seeing, and if those interactions fit his vision of teaching. We observed students in the videos making many

comments and asking questions of him while teaching. I took his observation in two directions, and I asked if part of his vision included having students interact with each other. I then asked about the students who were not interacting with him as a teacher. How could he be sure that they were learning as well? Jon responded with a shrug and admitted that my question was valid.

After reviewing my field notes and the transcriptions from my interactions with Jon, I note that employing Jon's vision of interaction may have been a less impactful fulcrum than if I had emphasized his vision of a productive citizenry. Reflecting on the difficulty he saw in his last video, as well as his vision of teaching, I think that reflecting with Jon on what it means to be a productive citizen, and thinking about the kinds of knowledge and behaviors that he envisions a productive citizen exemplifying may have had more impact on his instruction. In particular, focusing on the kinds of questions he can ask his students as a social studies teacher and searching for questions that bring about more in-depth interactions, more gray discussions, and more retention of content might have been a better coaching decision. Indeed, finding the best fulcrum point to get leverage with teachers requires more time than, to this point, I had put into working with Jon.

### **Islena**

Islena is an example of a teacher who readily embraced this professional learning experience as a way to learn to manage her classroom as a first year teacher. Her vision of teaching did not focus much on classroom management, yet she felt that her vision needed to be delayed until she learned to manage the classroom.

Islena is a first year teacher at Stetson Middle, teaching both 7<sup>th</sup> grade English and reading courses. Spent time in Australia doing her student teaching, but didn't feel ready to take on a classroom. After finishing her undergrad degree at a university in the northeast, she

interviewed for a teaching position in New Orleans. In that interview, she was asked what she would do to close the achievement gap. Not feeling like she could confidently answer that question, she decided to postpone teaching to spend a year as a nanny in Shanghai. Recognizing that she still had many questions about education and not feeling ready for a job, she applied for graduate school at another university to attain a master degree in reading education. She graduated from a prestigious teacher education program with a master's degree in reading to supplement her teaching degree.

Coupled with her love of adolescent literacy and a belief that it is through reading stories that students “learn how to be in the world,” Islena chose middle school because she felt that she could have “a greater impact cause they’re so moldable” at that age. Islena felt she could connect well with the middle school age students, despite it being a “transitional, tumultuous time” for these students.

Her first year teaching has been marked with difficulties, many of which are common among first year teachers. In particular, classroom management has been a struggle for Islena. At one point, the school's administration arranged for a teacher who excelled at classroom management take over Islena's classes for a week, but the return of the classes to Islena's management was not successful and they returned to the status quo. In particular, Islena has struggled with her fourth and sixth period classes, which have most of the same students enrolled.

### ***Vision of teaching***

In discussing her vision of education, Islena highlighted the importance of opening the world to her students. When asked about what she hopes her students would someday say to her, she replied, “I learned a lot about myself as a reader and a writer in your class. And I'm open to

trying new things.” She described how she wants her teaching to “open their world,” to “fully experience being human” and that students need to “know what else is out there.” In addition to a broader worldview, Islena envisioned her students asking questions, being curious and observant, and engaging in self-expression. In fact, when defining what she thought of good teaching, Islena said, “I think that’s what good teaching is; it’s getting people curious about that world and then giving them tools to go out and seek the answers.” She gave an example of this in describing an instructional moment when a student asked her a question about race. Abandoning her lesson plan and the standards, she spent time leading a discussion on race. Tempering these visionary aspirations is her emphasis on practical subjects such as having the skills to be able to get a job and communicate with other people. She identified reading skills and writing skills as necessary and something that will “aid” students for the rest of their lives as well as something that she wants students to love. In order to teach according to her vision, Islena believed it is important to put away the mandated tests and curriculum to focus on the aspects that are important to her.

Although she referred to this belief as “hippy dippy” she maintained that she wants her students to be curious and observant and learn for the sake of understanding. This tension was also highlighted in that she wanted her instruction to be “relevant” and “responsive to students’ interests” with ever changing lesson plans to meet that need. On the other hand, she also wanted to open up her students to the world around them – something that they might not find interesting or relevant.

Another important aspect of Islena’s vision of teaching is her desire to “make it real.” She interpreted this to mean that she wants her students to be readers and writers to prepare them for the real world and to help them make relevant connections to the world outside of school. Making it real meant that the content of Islena’s teaching will help students prepare to get a job,

perhaps in recognition that much of what is done in school is very distantly related to what she considers real. She felt it is important that when students ask, “When am I ever going to use this?” that Islena can provide answers about the relevancy of her courses. This is echoed in a later interview with Islena when she stated that a successful lesson needs to have “some tangible thing that they take away.”

When asked about the Wordle created from the first interview about her vision of teaching, Islena was pleased to see the words *world*, *different*, and *opinions*. These words encapsulated the broader perspective and differing experiences she wanted for her students. Extending such ideas into “thinking outside the box,” she felt that these words represented well what she envisioned her teaching to be. She would have liked to see phrases such as *cultural literacy*, *love of reading*, *love of writing*, *balance*, and *opinions* to be larger, stating that those ideas are more important to her than they appeared on the Wordle.

### Obstacles

As might be expected (Meister & Melnick, 2003) Islena has first year classroom management difficulties that she sees as an obstacle to enacting her vision of teaching. During her first semester teaching, Islena found it difficult to collaborate with the other teachers as she felt overwhelmed with classroom management and learning to navigate the school. She felt overwhelmed by the noisiness of her students, by their lack of focus on her instruction, and by trying to navigate the individual needs of her students. She tried a number of approaches with her students, and found it difficult to balance positive reinforcement with negative consequences. Although these issues were still very present, Islena had begun to reach out and collaborate with other teachers on the seventh grade team.

Although Islena did not talk about student motivation and self-management during the initial vision interviews, the importance of these ideas became apparent in later interviews and observations. For example, Islena wanted her students to arrive to class in “learning mode” and independently follow the instructions on the board. The aim of this was smoothness, so that other aspects of her vision may be implemented more easily. Islena struggled to figure out what motivates her students. She felt that she needs to

...tell them that they are going to college. A lot of them haven't thought about that, and their parents haven't been, and it's not on their radar. “You are going. You are. And so you'll need it there, and you'll need it after.” Trying to find good reasons why they do need, why this should be important to them. Cause grades aren't necessarily motivational to them. “You should turn this in so you get a good grade.” Or “You should work hard so you get a good grade.” They don't necessarily care about that. So trying to find something...

This search for what motivates her students was difficult for her as the ideas (grades, college) that motivated Islena as a student did not motivate her students. Because she felt that this is not the reality of the students in her classroom, her students' misbehaviors became an obstacle to Islena's vision of teaching.

Part of Islena's frustration with her first year of teaching stemmed from having a vision of what she would like to see happen with her students. She noted

I feel like [graduate school] teaches you best practices, gold and shiny ideal, and they don't necessarily teach you how to get there. So I just have been really frustrated the first semester. Being like, “I'm not here. Why am I not here? This is where I should be.” And

it's really hard to be like, "It's going to be a process and I'm not going to be here over night. And I have to be OK with this is where I'm at and I have so many more steps to go." But I'm just being more comfortable with the idea that it's not going to be perfect and that there's no such thing as perfect. This is the best I can do right now, and I'm trying really hard. And eventually I'll get there.

The gold and shiny ideal that Islena studied in her Master's program seemed too distant for Islena, and prevented her from seeing some of the realities of her work with her students. She did not recognize that her students would not be prepared for the kind of instruction that Islena had studied in her graduate program.

Another obstacle that Islena mentioned was the regimen of standardized tests for which she was supposed to prepare her students. A few weeks before the state test, Islena was pleased with the interest her students were showing as they read Collin's (2008) *The Hunger Games* as a class. Islena had imagined a series of learning activities and writing prompts based on the novel, but felt she had to save the "fun, creative stuff" for after state tests. This became a defining issue for Islena as she sought "balance" between what was being expected of her in regards to testing and accountability and her vision of teaching. As we would later engage in lesson planning, Islena highlighted this issue repeatedly.

### ***Professional learning foci***

There were many ideas that Islena proposed that would be suitable for professional development. One of her earlier ideas focused on the way that students entered into her classroom. She said, "I would like to start with you on getting the first five minutes really smooth in the classroom. And just get down routines of passing out papers, class roles, hand raising, getting attention...." Working on routines for classroom management was the primary



focus of Islena's professional development plans. This evolved into creating a routine for students both when they entered the classroom and when they finished their work. Other student routines in which Islena expressed interest included: teaching students to regulate the volume of their voice, hand-raising, and following directions written on her white board. Such routines were clearly technical interests that were an important aspect to Islena's well being as a teacher.

In addition to routines, Islena wanted to learn more about how to get her students to self-initiate and be motivated to learn. While the argument may certainly be made that Islena's interest in motivation could fit into any of Habermas' constitutive interests, in the context of Islena's classroom management needs, this also seems to be a technical interest. She noted that she wants her kids to be self-directed in getting started on their daily work and be ready to learn as they entered the classroom. At this point, her vision of self-initiated students was not about engaging intellectual curiosity in a manner that would inspire students to learn on their own. Islena wanted her kids to be motivated so that she could have a classroom environment that was more conducive to orderly and controlled study.

Toward the end of my time with Islena, she asked if she could participate in the professional learning about personal writing that Nora and I were doing. This represented an expansion into more of a lesson planning focus with an emphasis on the individual characteristics of students. Such a move fit well into Islena's vision of teaching, but she felt that improving the classroom management needed to come before her work on lesson planning.

The technical aspects were, unsurprisingly, very important to Islena. In fact she stated that although she was interested in collaborating with her colleagues, she worried that would be "overwhelming to align my stuff with theirs and figure it out." After learning how to manage her classroom better in the first semester, Islena described collaboration as "really helpful and I'm

excited to have somebody to bounce ideas off of.” This idea that the technical interests involved with learning how to teach must come before the practical or the emancipatory interests is evident in the way that Islena ordered her professional learning in the first year.

Because she was very interested in the technical aspects of teaching, Islena experienced some frustration with formal professional development. There had been several teachers in the school, coaches from the district, and myself who offered her advice and help with her classroom. She stated:

I’ve had different people come in. I guess what’s hard about feedback is when people give you feedback; it’s not necessarily consistent. So I feel like I’ve tried to take on different people’s suggestions to me and incorporate it, but then it’ll be conflicting.

For a first-year teacher who was struggling with the day-to-day aspects of teaching, clear and consistent feedback was welcome. Islena was not looking for someone to help her construct responses to the problems she was facing; she wanted someone to tell her what to do, providing a recipe for success, and fulfill her technical interests for classroom management.

### ***Coaching Islena***

In my role as a coach, I tried to reframe Islena’s worries about classroom management toward thinking about student learning. For example, during the second video-guided interview, Islena commented about how noisy and distracting the pencil sharpener was. I asked if she would prefer the students use pens, noting, “Another reason why you might want to consider pen, a lot of times when they’re turning in things, they’ve done lots of erasing. Sometimes it’s good to see what it is that they’ve erased so you can kind of see their thought process. That gives you that opportunity.” However, she did not seem to pick up on the suggestion that the students’ writing

utensils could give her important information about their learning. In this interview, we began planning the first of several small projects.

During the video-guided interviews, Islena focused heavily on student behavior, primarily on misbehavior. She noted that the first video made her feel better about her instruction, while the third video did the opposite. Both judgments were based on student behavior and classroom management. Rarely did she focus on student learning. Many times, Islena talked about what she would do differently after watching the video. Again, these re-dos were different ways to set up routines, such as passing out papers and having students signal when they were ready to move on.

After watching a few minutes of chaos of students entering her classroom during the video-guided interview, Islena felt that the best use of our time would be to plan routines for her students. She wanted to set routines that would ease the chaos, get students into their seats prepared with the tools (pen, paper, reading book) for the class, and, ostensibly, ready for the learning. She planned on buying each student a notebook, which would stay in the classroom, and required them to bring a pen or pencil and a reading book. Students who did not come prepared would need to go back and get the stuff they need, even if it meant they were marked tardy. When the students entered the room, Islena planned on having either a writing prompt or a sentence requiring grammar correction ready for the students that would get them thinking for the day's lesson. The pencil sharpener issue returned, and Islena decided that students would only be permitted to use the sharpener while they were working, not during instruction. As we discussed her routines, I felt that it was important to reframe this for both her and her students as something geared towards learning. As such, I recommended that she frame her presentation of the new routine to her students in such a way as to help them be ready for learning.

Before Islena implemented this plan with her students, she received a visit from a district coach who advised her to start her reading classes with 10 minutes of silent reading. Islena liked this idea, and she asked me to help her construct a reading log to keep track of what students were reading. Taking a coaching role, I was hesitant to just instruct her on how to create a reading log, and attempted to push her own thinking and reflection in the process.

Islena: OK. Should it be like a prediction for how many pages they think they can read and then how many they actually did read? Or just how many pages at the end?

Coach: Well...what do you think would be the advantage of having them predict?

Islena: So they get a gauge of how quickly they can get through a book.

Coach: Right. So yeah, you could put that on there.

Islena: I want to keep it simple. Probably just pages read.

At another moment, I asked, "I wonder about what it is you want to emphasize with the reading and if you want to emphasize how quickly they're reading and getting through the book in place of really emphasizing these connections or thoughts they're having with the book." This prompt led her to include spaces on the reading log for students to write responses and connections after they read. For the rest of the planning, she reviewed her procedure for teaching students how she wanted them to enter the room, while I asked clarifying questions to help her think through what she wanted this to look like and what difficulties might arise.

Throughout the interviews with Islena, clarifying questions were important not only for my own understanding of what she was saying, but so that she could pinpoint her own thoughts and feelings. In this example, Islena was watching a video of her own teaching:

Islena: That feels really loud. That's too loud for group work. I'm feeling stressed out. I'm feeling overwhelmed there, like "Oh my gosh, this isn't going the way I wanted it to."

Coach: So is it the loudness or that they're not doing what they're supposed to do that's really...?

Islena: Both.

Coach: Both.

Islena: Yes, both. The loudness because that's an oral cue to me that they're not doing what they're supposed to.

Coach: But if they were being that loud and you looked around and saw that they were discussing.

Islena: Then I'd be OK with it.

Coach: So it's really that they're not on task.

Islena: Yes.

Coach: And that they're not doing what they're supposed to.

Islena: Yes, on task talking is fine. On task talking that loud, that might even be a little loud for me, but it was very obvious looking around that they're like tapping, and they're asking about movies, you can just tell that, I think you can probably do a visual scan and tell if people are on task or not.

Such clarifying questions helped Islena to reframe the misbehaviors she was observing into a discussion on student learning. As such, it narrowed Islena's perception of the problem into an off-task problem rather than a volume problem.

Although I felt that Islena would prefer that I just tell her what to do and give her simple solutions to her questions, I felt it was important to have her work out the answers herself. Here are two examples where I turned the question back to Islena:

Islena: Should I nix the reading response or not have them do it? Is it just busy work?

Coach: Is it busy work?

Islena: I don't think so. It's asking them questions like...at first I had a whole list of responses they could choose from and turn in on a piece of paper to me, and then I was getting a variety of lengths and of quality.

And a second example:

Islena: OK. Should it be like a prediction for how many pages they think they can read and then how many they actually did read? Or just how many pages at the end?

Coach: Well...what do you think would be the advantage of having them predict?

Because Islena was so focused on classroom management and her vision of teaching was so focused on other aspects of teaching, I attempted to reframe her management issues in terms of her vision. For example, when Islena and I were creating a system for students to record the number of pages they were reading in class, I asked her about having students assess the quality of their reading time as well. "Those kinds of things where they're assessing their own thinking and their own work ethic and their own learning, I think that's kind of the direction that you'd

want to move them is to self-assessment, self-motivated learning and all that.” Islena agreed and altered her system to focus less on the number of pages the students were reading.

Perhaps because the classroom management issues that plagued Islena were so present, it required effort and skill to coach Islena beyond such issues. Using her vision of teaching and asking reflective questions helped Islena frame her classroom management issues as learning issues, providing her with clarity and direction that may last beyond the coaching experience.

### **Nora**

Nora is an example of a teacher who eagerly embraced this professional learning experience and engaged with the technical, practical, and emancipatory interests inherent in her vision of teaching. An important part of her vision of teaching focused on the individual development and growth of each of her students, with each finding their unique voice through reading and writing. Of the four cases, Nora was the least focused on practical and mundane issues, instead focusing on the aesthetic and broad scope of her students’ learning.

Nora grew up in a rural part of the state where she is teaching, and recognizes that her parents and her teachers gave her opportunities that many of her peers did not have. She attended an elite university and earned an undergraduate degree and teaching certificate in English. Nora is in her second year of teaching at Stetson.

I conducted four interviews with Nora, a vision of teaching interview, two video-guided interviews, and a final interview. In addition, I met with Nora to plan a project focused on planning instruction to help her students engage with personal writing. I also spent several hours observing her classes, visiting during lunch and recess, chatting in the hallways between classes, and meeting after school to look at practice state assessment results. In this section, I will present

findings about how Nora's vision of teaching traced throughout my time with her, as well as her professional learning trajectory.

### ***Vision of teaching***

When Nora talked about her vision of teaching, the phrases *inspiration* and *break through* peppered her discussion. She wanted her students to “be inspired” and to “be whatever it is that is your idea of what you want to do.” She spoke with a strong sense of teaching individuals to develop in their own way with inspiration and passion. Nora envisioned that a student's unique identity and characteristics should be explored in school and could be examined through literature, writing, and communication.

When talking about what she would like her students to take from her teaching, Nora hoped her students would say, “I have a dream and I have a goal, and I got to do it because I was ready.” However, she worries that “some of our kids don't even really dream. Or they haven't shown me yet, I'm sure it's there.” Nora's words underscored the centrality of individuality, dreams, and aspirations to her teaching.

In talking about her vision of teaching, Nora stated that she believes in the power of education to change the trajectory of the lives of her students. Taking a social mobility stance, she envisioned teaching as a tool to “...break down barriers and open the doors and help them [students] see more. Help them see more possibilities for themselves, for their own futures, for people around them.” According to Nora's vision, this does not happen when all students receive the same instruction. Rather, she believed that one of the important roles of education is to help students develop their individual “gifts.” These gifts are unique to the students and can be developed by helping the students learn to love learning. This individual development



perspective on education was a “passion” of Nora’s. Yet, as a teacher she realized that not all of her teaching would be “incredible, inspirational experiences” and was disappointed in this.

As a teacher, Nora valued being at a school and with a team of teachers that afforded her the freedom and the flexibility to teach in the way that best suited her and her students. Disdainful of pre-packaged curricula, she favored creating her own teaching materials and “finding what works best for kids.” However, she conceded that not having a set curriculum with materials was difficult for her when she was a first year teacher.

When asked to identify video segments that were good examples of her instruction matching her vision, Nora pointed out several instances. During her instruction on making writing that evidences personal voice, a student brought up the topic of *swag*, and knowing what is swag and who has swag. At this point, two of her male students perked up and began to participate in the class discussion. Nora pointed out that this was the most buy-in she has seen from these boys. That she was able to get such participation from students who typically do not participate in class was nearing Nora’s vision of teaching.

When observing some classroom management troubles on her videos, Nora remarked, I don’t think their problem is the management. I really don’t. That’s just my instinct on it... I think the aggressiveness it would take to keep them looking like perfect students would make their brain shut down even more. But that’s just where my philosophy is with them. I feel like it’s better to let there be a sense of self and fun in the class...

This sense of self and fun are clearly important aspects of Nora’s vision of teaching and override her “teacher control-freak” desires and expectations for a silent classroom. In fact, while

examining the original Wordle from the first interview, Nora felt that it did not adequately highlight ideas such as *relationships*, *fun*, and *entertainment*.

Nora noted while observing a video of her teaching that calling students out publicly for misbehavior is something that contradicts her vision of teaching. This created tension for her, because she was unsure about the role of managing students in her classroom. She stated:

...you don't want to communicate that you just do whatever you want because this is your world. It's 'I'm going to be considerate of you without requiring that you're considerate of me because you're being inconsiderate. And I'm going to bend over backwards to do everything I can to be considerate of you and your feelings and your emotions, but you can do whatever you want.' I think to some degree we've taught kids that. 'We're going to do whatever we can to help you and help you do better in school and give you the modifications that you need.' I believe in all those things, but I think a lot of our kids are getting really, really used to that and use to it's not a two-way street.

Nora's concern about holding students accountable for misbehavior without calling them out publicly aligned with her vision of teaching that focuses on individual growth. She considered the best instruction to happen individually, and so managing behavior also should happen individually. Yet, she recognized that her students not only need individual instruction, but also to be held individually accountable for what they do.

### Obstacles

Considering the central role student identity and aspirations played in Nora's vision of teaching, it was not surprising that she identified "not fully understanding all my kids and where they come from" as a primary obstacle to her vision of teaching. This difficulty, according to

Nora, was compounded by the limitations of time in her teaching. She felt that she did not have time to get to know the students well enough, to differentiate her instruction for each student, as well as time for her own personal professional development.

In talking about obstacles to Nora's vision of teaching, she was reluctant to identify problems that were outside of her sphere of influence. She felt that the school administration, the school district, and her colleagues were very supportive of how she would like to teach. The only external issue that she was concerned about centered on the previous educational experiences and home lives of her students. She stated that many of her students are inadequately prepared for her seventh grade curriculum because of their situations at home and because of inadequate instruction in earlier grades.

When asked about what she saw on a video of her teaching that did not line up with her vision of teaching, Nora was quick to point out the routine and boring nature of setting up folders with her students to track classwork. She stated, "I'm so bored. They probably are too. But how else could I have done this? There's a certain degree of 'We just have to pass this out. You just have to get this together.' And that's not the normal pace that my lessons follow." In a later interview, Nora described feeling discouraged by the time she spends on classroom management. She describes that time as "wasted." Nora's struggles with routines and classroom management clashed with her vision of teaching that was inspirational and focused on finding beauty and meaning.

Later, while planning an instructional unit on personal writing, Nora observed that it was hard to teach the way she really wanted to because it was hard to find time to conference with each of the students about their individual writing. Having to spend time in class on what Nora considers "basics" (e.g. conventions, spelling) stood in the way of her teaching the way she

idealized. While reflecting on her vision of teaching and looking at a video of her teaching, Nora observed:

It's not as much a tension with the standards as much as with the facts of life. I think the standards are important because I think they need to know the conventions of English. I do agree with that. And I do see it as my responsibility and want to help them with that. In my ideal world there are a lot of those they would have before they come to 7th grade. I spend a lot more time than I would like trying to make sure kids recognize when sentences are run-ons, and recognizing things aren't sentences and just structuring paragraphs and structuring essays. A lot of that, in my ideal, they would already have. And we could do more craft and more style, which would fit my personality and my style better. But since given that it's not where they are, my philosophy is also that they should have those basic building blocks. I can't sit here and just rattle on about "Isn't this a beautiful passage? Let's write like that." when I have kids who are still figuring out how to get sentences to make sense together. It's not really tension at the standard I think, it's just maybe the age group I'm in and the things that I'm doing are more step by step building block than maybe I would prefer in an ideal world.

Later she mentioned that being held to assessments and standards gets in the way of her teaching the way she felt she should.

Yeah, needing to make sure that there's assessment. Cause that's important to me too. I want them to find things that they like, but my job is also to make sure that they know what a simile is and that they can read and that they can write and that they can do all these things. So there also has to be a portion where they have to learn a skill. And watching this makes me even more motivate to think how they can learn those skills

through doing and without as much of the traditional teaching model of me tell, you practice, we assess. That's an important part, but if you're going to talk about getting in the way that does get in the way cause you've got to do that.

Further obstacles that Nora noticed while observing herself teach centered on classroom management. Nora was frustrated by students not turning in assignments, even though the assignments were completed, and by having to repeat instructions many times. She felt that such tasks were wasting time and keeping her from spending class time on the kind of instruction she valued. She took this as evidence that students weren't "getting this and making it their own."

I conducted two video-guided interviews with Nora. The first video was of her class creating class folders to organize homework and keep of grades. Nora's objective for this class, which was at the beginning of the new grading term, was to create a system whereby her students would be more responsible and aware of their assignments and the impact they had on their grades. Nora was frustrated that her students were capable of earning better grades and of doing the work, but their organization skills were lacking. In addition to creating and decorating their folders, Nora modeled the mathematical formula for determining the percentage score of their grades, gave the students a tracking sheet to keep track of their work and their grades, and lectured the students on the importance of being responsible for their own learning. She then put up an overhead projection of the grade that her students had earned on yesterday's assignment. A number of students realized that they had done the assignment, but had not turned it in – the assignment was stashed in their backpacks. According to Nora, this lesson did not represent her vision of teaching well – there was not space for creativity or individuality. However, she believed this to be a necessary step to routinize the aspects of teaching that might otherwise

demand so much time and attention that aspects of teaching that do align with her vision are neglected.

In the second video-guided interview, I observed Nora engaging her students in a poetry gallery walk. Her purpose in this activity was to expose her students to a variety of poetry genres, and to encourage them to find poetry that spoke to them. She had posted a number of poems on the walls around the room, and students were instructed to read each of the poems. Nora described this activity as closely mirroring her vision of teaching in that it created spaces for students to explore and to be inspired. However, she noted in the video that some groups engaged in off-task behavior such as chatting in small groups about subjects not related to poetry, which does not reflect her vision of teaching. Furthermore, Nora intimated that her constant repetition of instructions is evidence that students are not “making it their own” and thus she is not reaching her vision of teaching. When watching this video, Nora liked that many of her students interacted with students they would never have spoken with before.

### ***Professional learning foci***

Nora had many ideas for professional learning during my time with her. While she did not explicitly intend to pursue each of these ideas, they provide insight into the kinds of questions on which Nora was reflecting when thinking about her own teaching. Using Habermas’ constitutive knowledges to categorize Nora’s different ideas suggests the important role that context plays in professional development.

Nora expressed interest in professional learning that could be described as practical by Habermas. During class discussions, Nora felt that having students respond to each other’s comments as much as they responded to her comments would line up better with her vision of teaching. In discussing this topic, she also brought up a technical interest in that she wanted to

find some research that would guide her on how she should respond to students' comments. She wanted to know if she should build or praise student comments, or would doing so stymie the responses of other students.

Another technical interest of Nora's was her concern for her classroom management and time constraints. While observing a video of her teaching, she noted that it took more time than she would like for the main classroom activity to begin. This became one of the central themes to Nora's discussions. She recognized that there were lots of little things (e.g. repeating instructions to students, formatting assignments) that took lots of time but were not central to her vision. It was important to Nora to figure out how to streamline such routines so that they didn't take much time and so that students would be responsible for accomplishing and fulfilling the instructions.

Another technical interest Nora discussed concerned the inadequacy of schools and teachers to reach individuals. She felt that the number of students plus their different needs requires more adults. She noted,

You're just not enough to get around... I read books on writer's workshop every summer. I look at them and think, "This is great." And then I never can make it. I still haven't figured out the way to implement it. I read it, it sounds awesome. And then I try to wrap my mind around how to make it work and I have faith I'm going to get there. I'm just not there yet. How do you get everyone working smoothly to be able to actually work with one kid? And how to do it enough days in a row that you can actually talk with each kid?

Nora's interest in running writer's workshop with her students is stifled by feeling unsure about how to find time to adequately reach each of the students. Nora is not interested in doing a writer's workshop if she is not able to find that time to do the workshop well.

In the more formal professional learning settings, Nora brought in her emancipatory interests. She found it discouraging that she could have a great relationship with students, teach great lessons which show her students progressing, but it still was not enough to change the lives of her students. She spoke of one student in particular, who really responded to some of her lessons and had a great relationship with Nora, but did not have the skills to succeed in the eighth grade and probably should not go on, despite her progress. Nora said, "...it's kind of freeing, but also really frustrating cause I just think like, 'Maybe what I'm doing with [Carina] is exactly what I'm supposed to do, but she's still going to fail my class, and she's still going to fail seventh grade.'" Nora sensed a disconnect, though, between helping students prepare for future success in school and wondering if that is the same thing as helping students prepare to lead happy lives. She wondered about the skills needed to get good grades and pass standardized tests are the things that students really need. She concluded with, "I guess I just found myself constantly conflicted what my job is I'm supposed to do for them. What I'm even supposed to do for them." Although Nora was unable to answer her own questions, this line of questions leans toward emancipatory in that she recognized that the traditional roles and models of education were insufficient to change the lives of students or bring about her hopes for social mobility. Additionally, hard work and motivation were inadequate; therefore there must be some larger structures that hold students back.

Nora's emancipatory critique and questioning about the role of education and her role within the system of education was very broad. She stated:



We train them to sit still in rows and be quiet and take directions from the boss and submit to authority. The values we teach are for a working class that is not opening up jobs for them. I think that definitely is an issue. But then education is trying to swing away from that. Your education institutions, your colleges, are pushing away from that for sure. Your reformers are pushing away from that for sure. So coming into this idea ‘I need to make them thinkers, I need to make them learners, I need to make them questioners, I need to make them critical thinkers’ so that polarizing political ads that are full of bias don’t work anymore because now we have an educated society that can think. Cause I look at the stuff that drives me crazy about the world, the country, it’s like, ‘If our kids were educated, that wouldn’t work anymore.’

Nora recognized her role as a teacher to prepare her students for their future. Furthermore, she saw that some of the traditional educational norms were changing and were insufficient for the needs of her students. In this next statement, Nora continued in her critique and began to ask herself some difficult questions about time and curricular choices.

The only reason that oppression works is that people are still in a point where they can be and not know that’s what’s happening or that they’re being taken advantage of. So I want to help with that, but how do you do that in one year on your own? And how do you do that and still make sure they know the difference between a metaphor and a simile? Who cares? I mean, I care, but really honestly, who cares? I understand why my kids don’t care about it. I think there’s more to it than making the lesson cute enough so that they have fun. I think that’s kind of been our answer as teachers and as school systems. That coopted education is a big push here, which is all about bright colors. It’s brain thinking, which is good. But how do you get them, basically, how do you fool them into wanting to

do it? And that's great, and that's going to help them learn the steps, help them get their test scores out, but then is every kid supposed to be a philosopher? I don't know. But I think that's kind of what we want. I want all kids to be able to really dig deeply, really be able to critically think. I don't know that my classroom does that because my classroom is so split, because I'm split.

Nora felt a strong tension in deciding upon the most appropriate curriculum for her students. She was critical of window dressing the conventional English class routine to simply make it more appealing rather than engaging in a curriculum that is meaningful and purposeful to the students. Yet, on the other hand, Nora wanted to address the academic standards "purposefully, strategically, and systematically," recognizing that these standards were the ways that her students would be measured, only she wanted to do it in such a way that leaves most of the class time exploring ideas, art, and literature that she hopes students would find interesting and provide an emotional response.

Another inkling of emancipatory interests came when Nora talked in her second video guided interview about the need for students to engage in self-reflection. Nora felt that school and society were not structured in such a way that allow for the spaces for solitude necessary for such self-reflection. Friends, media, and school expectations that precluded spaces for reflection were bombarding students.

These emancipatory interests all led to her project where she wanted her students to do some writing about themselves and to explore their identity in a deeper way. After engaging in such a critique, Nora decided that she would most be interested in a professional learning project that began to address such a critique. She opted for working through a writing project with her

students that would help them to connect to their environments and situations in a deeper, more meaningful way.

### *Coaching Nora*

Nora's engagement with emancipatory interests, unlike the other participants, revealed themselves in both the formal and informal professional development settings. As a coach, responding to her critique involved several coaching moves. As Nora talked about her concerns, I would ask her to provide examples of what she was critiquing. I asked questions such as, "What would that look like?" as well as restating her statements and asking a question, "In listening to you talk about it this, it sounds like this more than other things really ties into what your vision is of education and finding this intrinsic motivation and finding what inspires a student. Kind of this deeper connection?" This was important in that it not only helped to push her own thinking about what she was saying, but when it came time to plan a professional learning project, Nora had already talked through concrete examples of ideas that came from her vision of teaching. In the following example, Nora was trying to determine why she felt dissatisfied with her students' performance in class:

Coach: Instruction goes smoothly but then they're still not doing well enough.

Nora: Exactly. But they're still grasping the content/making that effort that I'm expecting.

Coach: Do you think maybe you know why, or have ideas?

As the coach who is trying to value the teacher's experiences and vision of teaching, I found it be useful to encourage the participants to be very clear about the things they were saying as well as to initiate their own responses and solutions to some of the problems they presented. In

particular, nudging Nora to be more exact in how she framed her observations and questions about education seemed to push her thinking in more critical directions.

### **Cross-case Analysis**

Looking across the four cases, findings regarding the vision of teaching, video-guided interview, and coaching are evident. These findings suggest that the participating teachers experienced considerable tensions between their visions of teaching and their actual implementation. In addition, as the participants engaged in this study, their visions of teaching became better defined and grew in scope. Finally, the participants all tended to focus on the practical and technical interests in spaces that could be described as more formal for professional development. Emancipatory interests were mostly aroused in less formal spaces such as lunchtime or coffee shops.

When I was originally thinking about how a teacher might respond to questions about their vision of teaching, I thought about how I would have answered such questions when I was a teacher. I was expecting a multitude of platitudinous responses with little semblance to the reality of their practice, such as “all children will find success” or “all students will learn to love reading.” Although they are admirable sentiments, such responses can be too vague and ungrounded to produce meaningful results. While teachers did provide responses along those lines, many of their responses were much more concrete and deliverable. One commonality that I observed among participants was that their visions of teaching were balanced between lofty generalizations and concrete expectations.

As expressed by the teachers, their visions of teaching strongly tied into the content area they were teaching. For example, the reading and English teacher participants focused heavily on communicating and reading, while the social studies teacher focused on understanding cultures

and citizenship. However, common to all of their visions was an emphasis on making meaning and thinking deeply about both their learning and themselves. For example, Islena noted that she wanted her students to experience the world more fully and come to a better understanding of themselves. Whether the details of their visions focused on understanding different peoples, places, and cultures in history, or understanding characters and motives from literature, all of the participating teachers expressed in their visions an interest in having their students think carefully about identities and connect classroom experiences to their own lives.

Although the participants' visions might sound lofty when they discuss their desires for students to connect learning to their own identities and to the larger world, the teachers enacted this aspect of their vision in very concrete ways. For example, Nora had her students read Sandra Cisneros' description of her character Esperanza's dreams about her someday home from the book, *House on Mango Street*. In this description, the author ties everyday objects such as pillows and the color purple to larger dreams and desires. Following this lead, Nora assigned her students to write about their dream homes, including details that went beyond "bricks and the number of bedrooms" to represent the kind of person they hoped to become as well as the values that are important to them as people.

Another example of this connection between idealized and concrete visions of identity and culture showed itself in Jon's classroom. In learning about the religious practices of people around the world, Jon would include generalizations about the tenets, histories, stories, and traditions that were pertinent to the religion. In order to help his students better connect these large ideas he would then tell his students that he was an adherent to that faith and would describe his life and his point of view on the world. Students were encouraged at this point to ask further questions and try to understand the religion being studied. In doing so, Jon was providing

a face and a concrete perspective to a subject that may have seemed alien and removed from the lifeworlds of the students.

These differences between the aspirational generalities and the concrete demands of routine teaching created tensions for the participants. They often felt that their loftier dreams of students engaging eagerly in their curriculum were blocked by the need to manage ordinary tasks in the classroom or prepare for state examinations. It was often hard for the participants to draw connections between the quotidian demands of a school system and their struggles to create a classroom that resembled their visions of teaching.

Throughout the professional learning experience, there was evidence that the teachers' visions of teaching and the teachers' articulation of their vision were not static. Whether it was the introduction of a new idea, such as Jon's teaching the gray moments or Leah and Nora's taking back the profession mantra, or the clearer articulation of an idea present in their vision of teaching, such were given to change. This was particularly noticeable when the teachers viewed the Wordle created from the first interview. The Wordle, by simply relying on common word counts, was not meant to provide a complete picture of their vision of teaching; rather it was useful as a tool to help the teachers revisit and deepen their understanding of their vision. All of the teachers made comments while looking at the Wordle that suggested surprise at some of the words that were included, as well as a list of words that should be included or made larger to make the representation more accurate. Whether Jon's shift in focus from retention to discussing gray areas, Nora's drilling down on the concept of creating personal connections via literacy, or Leah's recognition of the role of metacognition and self-awareness in her vision, as the teachers observed their instruction and reflected on their vision, the shape of their visions began to morph into something that was better defined and clearer in their own minds.

In examining the ways in which the teachers' interests in professional learning could be categorized with Habermas constitutive knowledges, it is evident that the video guided interviews created a constrained place where only technical and practical interests were enjoined across the cases. This is not surprising, considering that the expectation was to view the video and find examples of moments that matched or did not match the teachers' visions of teaching. Certainly the technical and the practical aspects of teaching are more evident on a video than an emancipatory interest might be. As such, the role of the coach in broadening the scope to include emancipatory knowledge became essential.

In addition, interviews with teachers about their experiences and professional learning needs suggest that their experiences with professional development have been predominantly technical (e.g. Battelle, technology conference) with a few practical interests included (e.g. professional development about student behavior and social expectations). As such, the perception of this experience as professional development yields an expectation and orientation toward the technical and the practical for the participating teachers. This further highlights the need for a coaching voice to move the professional learning experiences into a broader field that includes all of Habermas' interests.

The places in which the participating teachers engaged in emancipatory interests were the more informal spaces such as coffee shops, the school playground, and the teachers' lunchroom. Classrooms and hallways also became informal spaces open to emancipatory interests once the dismissal bell rang and the students had left. In such spaces, the participants' discourses were free to change from the mundane technical and practical aspects of teaching to the broader emancipatory aspects. In these spaces, conversations about taking back the profession, resistance

to standardized testing, and the need to encourage creativity and individuality flourished among participants.

An interesting example of this generality occurred in the last video-guided interview with Nora. Although the interview took place during school hours in her classroom, she went right into emancipatory interests at the beginning of the interview. Interestingly, she did not want to even watch the video during the interview because she already knew what she wanted to talk about and did not feel it was necessary to watch the video to understand. As such, this setting became less of a video-guided interview, and more closely resembled the kinds of conversations we had during lunch or on the playground. This suggests that the combination of formal spaces for professional learning with the videos of their teaching reinforce a highly practical and technical focus to the learning.

### **Coaching**

When coaching with these four participant teachers, I found that the interviews and conversations that helped me to understand their vision of teaching also provided direction and leverage for professional learning. For example, when interviewing Nora, she repeatedly turned to ideas centered on having students connect personally through literature. Through interviews, we determined that this was a powerful and motivating idea for Nora. Therefore, I centered my coaching on helping Nora reflect on how her instruction was or was not helping students connect to literacy in more personal ways. In essence, their vision of teaching yielded different fulcra upon which we could leverage their professional learning activities intended to meet teacher needs. This however did not work perfectly, particularly as was mentioned with Jon.

Centering the professional learning on the teachers' visions of teaching provided a space where as a coach I could be honest about my observations and critique what I saw without



undermining teacher's sense of being in charge of their professional learning. For example, in coaching Islena there were many times in which it would have been easier if I had simply provided her with instruction on how to improve her management. Yet, by prompting her to come up with her own solutions, she may be able to solve such problems without the need of a coach and maintain a sense of ownership over her work, despite the extra effort.

However, this professional space has limitations. For example, when Jon asked me to provide feedback to him at the end of a video guided interview, I noted that there were "things that I saw in class that I don't feel comfortable talking about because he hasn't given me permission in his vision." This idea of permissions is important as a coach. When engaged in coaching, I felt that the ideas the teachers expressed in their visions were available to be discussed, while ideas not expressed in their visions had to wait for the teacher to bring them up. For example, there were many instances in which I felt that one of Jon's struggles was that his grasp of his content was inadequate, yet I also felt that introducing that idea would damage our professional relationship and Jon's willingness to work with a coach. However, when he brought up the idea of discussing gray issues with his students, this gave me an opening as a coach to help him think through what might be a gray issue in his curriculum.

In the final interviews, I asked the four teachers to talk about their overall impressions of this professional learning cycle as well as any specific aspects they would change or keep the same. The participants were all very favorable about the video guided interview, remarking that they felt it was impactful to see their own teaching and have someone to talk to about what they saw. They also liked how the professional learning cycle was framed around their visions and interests. What did not work well for them was the brevity of the professional learning. Many of the participants' professional interests would require much more time to initiate, evaluate, and

adjust than was available. Nora, in particular, felt that a professional learning project focused on helping her students to really connect in personal ways with writing would take the full school year to develop and then many more years to hone and strengthen.

### **Video guided interviews**

The teacher participants consistently appreciated watching themselves on video. It is apparent that the video changes their view of what is happening in the classroom. For example, after Islena watched a video of a class where there were significant management problems, she says, “In the moment, it felt disastrous. It felt terrible. It felt really loud and really chaotic. I felt like it just was not smooth...and looking at it now, it doesn’t feel that disastrous. It just feels like I have a lot to work on.” Watching her teaching on camera helped Islena changed her view of what had happened in her classroom from a despairing situation to a hopeful and helpful situation.

With rare exceptions, the teacher participants were very willing to let me observe and/or record any class. However, as I arranged times to record with teachers, they would try to have me come when they were going to try something that was either new, troublesome, or out of the ordinary. I noted that it sometimes felt that they were less eager for me to observe their mundane instruction. Comments such as, “I’m not doing anything interesting in that period,” or “There won’t be anything to see then” were commonplace as we were planning observations. On the other hand, there were many times when the teachers had an activity in mind that they really did want to see on tape. This reluctance toward the mundane may be interpreted in a number of ways. On the one hand, it may be viewed as a need to only be observed when they are at their best. However, contrary to this interpretation was the teachers’ openness to discussing their shortcomings and inviting observation of their most difficult class periods. It may also be

interpreted as the teachers' recognition of where they would most need to focus their professional learning. This recognition suggests that teachers are cognizant of their professional learning needs and the areas in which they need to grow. Another interpretation of this pattern of behavior could be that the participants were comfortable in admitting need in certain areas of growth, but feared that there may be something in their mundane instruction that would require reflection and questioning that was not comfortable. Regardless of the interpretation, a Habermasian interpretation of the coaching method requires that the teachers be able to negotiate and guide their own professional learning.

The manner in which the teachers set up the recordings can be understood in several ways. At first glance, I wondered if the teachers did not want to be observed at all in certain periods or for certain activities. Then I noticed that the choosiness in having me video classes did not extend to arranging for observations. The only times that teachers recommended I did not come for observations was during mandated standardized testing periods. This suggests that the teachers were being strategic in choosing class periods to record in that there was an interest in something happening in such classes.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion**

#### **Overview of Key Findings**

The primary aim of this study is to explore how a literacy coach might support professional learning that is transformative, sustainable and meets the needs of teachers. Although literacy coaching has been shown to be an effective tool for changing the instructional practices of teachers, this study also looks at the contextual factors that surround professional development and coaching in a school setting. In particular, this study explores how a coach might encourage teachers to grow professionally and engage in learning that, using Habermas' framework may be considered transformative. In the previous chapter I outlined the results and findings of this study. In this chapter these findings are applied to the research questions. Findings are then viewed in consideration with the extant relevant bodies of literature, their implications, as well as future directions implied by this research.

Several research questions guided this study. The first research question sought to understand the professional interests of teachers in a space where they are encouraged to design their own professional learning.

- On what aspects of professional practice do teachers focus when given the opportunity to design their own professional development?

Using Habermas, it is evident that during times and in spaces that may be demarcated as formal and professional spaces, the participating teacher focused mainly on the practical and technical interests to their teaching. These interests include such things as finding appropriate texts for lessons, classroom management, helping students connect with literacy in more personal ways,

teaching methods for text structures, interpreting test scores, time management, and engaging students in classroom discussion.

Emancipatory discourses did take place, but mostly outside of formal professional development spaces. The most notable example of emancipatory interests being engaged centered on the idea that teachers needed to take back their profession, with a clear emphasis on power in decision making. Leah and Nora felt that teachers needed to be treated more like professionals and have the responsibility to make policy choices that affected both teaching as well as the teaching profession. These discussions did not take place in the formal professional learning spaces; rather they took place on the playground, in the hallway, after school, and off the school campus.

The second research question focused on the teachers' visions of teaching and how they informed the professional development choices they made. Part of this question includes a description of the teachers' visions, as well as the impact of the context on the realization of their visions.

- How does a teacher's vision of teaching align with their professional development choices?
  - How do teachers describe their vision of teaching?
  - How does the instructional context (e.g. administrative expectations, policies, student needs, and parent expectations) impact the enactment of the teachers' vision of teaching?

The presence of the personal narrative in the teachers' vision of teaching is notable. Whether it was Jon's story of the history courses he loved or Leah's story about learning to love reading,

there were significant events in each participant's life that informed and helped to shape their vision of teaching. Furthermore, important elements of the participants' upbringing may be linked to their visions of teaching and their instruction. For example, Leah, having been raised in an authoritative religious home, was not accustomed to questioning broader structural constraints on her teaching or in the lives of her students. In addition to being influenced by their past, their visions of teaching also included elements that correlated closely with the content areas they had chosen to pursue.

In describing their vision, the teacher participants identified obstacles that are both located in the broader educational structures and in the students' homes. Motifs such as testing and core curriculum demands took time away from teaching what the participants thought were most important in the visions. Participating teachers felt that previous teachers insufficiently equipped many of their students and/or their home lives to succeed well in school. Universally, teachers felt that the local administration was not the obstacle to implementing their vision it could have been.

There appeared to be a connection between the kinds of ideas the teachers expressed in their vision of teaching and the kinds of topics they were interested in pursuing as professional learning. Nora, whose vision was marked with beliefs about personal expression and growth, wanted to teach writing in such a way that students made a connection on a deep personal level between writing and their inner world. Jon, whose vision was characterized by student participation, looked at how students interacted with him in the video recordings. Islena's vision of opening the world to her students, however, was put on hold as she experienced novice teacher growing pains with classroom management. Leah took a very pragmatic approach to her project in focusing on the kinds of texts that would appear on the state tests.

Yet, at the same time, it appeared in the video guided interviews that the participants were often sabotaging their beliefs in their instruction. Despite claiming that he was very interested in having students play a central role in classroom interactions, Jon spent most of his time lecturing his students. Although Islena wanted to open up the world to her students, as had been done for her, she engaged in very constrictive forms of behavior management. This suggests that the space between a teacher's vision of how they should be teaching and their actual practice is very wide, and is potentially fruitful for professional learning of all of Habermas' interests.

Starting with this space provided by the vision of teaching offered me, as the coach, numerous pathways and fulcra for reflection and professional learning. I was not always successful at finding the most impactful aspects of their visions. For example, with Jon I chose to leverage his interest in participation from his vision of teaching. This turned out to not be as impactful as he was already mostly satisfied with the participation in his classroom. However, with the other participants, the fulcrum points in the visions were more apparent and thus I was able to leverage more learning.

The final questions in this study take a reflexive stance and focus on the coaching of the teachers. The purpose of these questions is to think about tools for creating transformative and sustainable professional learning opportunities.

- How might a coach use a teacher's vision as a coaching tool?
  - How might a coach help a teacher to align their instruction with their educational vision?
- How might a coach use video guided interviews as a coaching tool?

Starting the coaching experience with the teacher's vision of teaching created a wider space where I could coach the teacher that respected the teacher's autonomy and professionalism. The vision of teaching created a basis from which I could ask pointed questions about teaching practices while maintaining a stance that focused on the teacher's own needs. For example, when Jon expressed that discussing gray issues was important to his vision of teaching in his social studies class, as the coach I could hold him accountable to that ideal. Then, when I noted that Jon passed over an opportunity to discuss a gray issue, I asked him some pointed questions about why he did not engage that discussion.

While observing the teachers instruct their classes, I had many opportunities to help them align their instruction with their vision of teaching. Mostly this occurred in discussion and reflection with interview questions about how their instruction fits with their vision of teaching. Teacher participants remarked that viewing their own teaching on video changed their perception of what was happening in the classroom. At times this was a relief to the teacher as they recognized that the lesson went better than they had thought, and at other times the video revealed to the teacher aspects of the lesson that did not align with their intent or vision. As a coach, having the teacher watch their own video and choose video segments put the onus on the teacher to guide the professional learning agenda.

## **Discussion**

### **Habermas and Mezirow**

In some regards, evidence from this study suggests that coaching can create a space where Habermas' communicative action can occur between teachers and the coach. Habermas' theory rests upon the idea that adult communication can be free of coercion or outside agenda by focusing my agency on the participants' visions of teaching. As the coach, I strived to encourage



teachers to set their own agendas for the professional learning space we were co-creating. However, to believe that such a space was completely free from my agenda or the agendas of those who would have sway over the classroom is disingenuous (Pennycook, 2001).

For example, due to my own understanding of current literacy research, part of my agenda became such to encourage Leah to focus more on reading comprehension and less on fluency. Certainly, many in the literacy field would support such a move, but doing so in this setting appeared a mismatch with communicative action. Even though I framed my agenda using her vision of teaching, that interpretation of her vision was mine. Perhaps with more questioning (e.g. How does reading fluency/reading comprehension fit into your vision of teaching?) the professional learning space could more closely approximate communicative action. Indeed, Leah's adoption of my agenda by including the phrase *and reading comprehension* when she spoke about fluency may represent a shift in belief about her role as a teacher as a result of my imposition.

In addition to my own agendas subverting communicative action, it must be acknowledged that both my agendas and the participants' agendas are heavily influenced by the context in which we found ourselves. For example, the principal of Stetson Middle asked that all of the teachers do the Battelle workshop on formative assessment. And, perhaps unsurprisingly, each of the participant teachers mentioned a desire or an interest in formative assessment in my coaching work with them. Certainly they may have been interested in this topic without the principal's mandate, but this situation should create pause as the possibility for communicative action to truly occur is considered.

Another example of an outside agenda presenting itself in the professional learning space could be Jon's choice of focusing on "something that will help my kids read or do math better."

This was not part of his original vision of teaching, but he was worried about his students' performance on tests that were not part of his curriculum or classes. As such, he felt the need to invest his class time on topics that were outside of his area of focus.

In addition to the agendas of other people implicating themselves on the communicative action space, there were many structural considerations that constricted that space. Structures such as the district's requirement of a number of hours of professional development selected from a menu of options provided a constraint on the time and space as well as the focus of their professional learning spaces. Also, the busy lives and frenetic demands of after-school activities, lesson planning, and grading all create pressures that impinge upon our attempts to make time for lengthy and in-depth consideration of the teachers' instructional practices. Certainly such structures must be addressed when considering a Habermasian space for learning.

Another constraint on creating emancipatory spaces for professional learning is less structured and formal. Although the team of teachers in the hallway was very supportive of the participants' questioning and critiquing, the participants felt that many of the other teachers would be resistant. In interviewing and discussing the school climate of support, certain individuals within the corps of teachers yielded a great deal of social influence in the school that they wielded to maintain a conservative and traditional approach to learning and teaching. As such, it must be considered that the participating teachers were working in a complex environment, and that some aspects of that environment might be stifling to critique and change.

Considering Pennycook's critique of Habermas that implies a professional learning space cannot be completely free from outside agendas, then to the point that it is possible, coaching can facilitate such a space for communicative action. When teachers brought up ideas about improving their students' test scores, it was possible to take such responses as a coach and

reframe them to check to see whose agenda such an action would be. This could be done by asking questions such as, “Is this what would match your vision of teaching?” or “Is this what you think your students need the most at this time?” Such questions were designed to encourage the participants to think of themselves as the professionals with decision-making power who know what is the best agenda for their students’ learning. Responses to such questions yielded answers that confirmed that the proposed action to raise test scores was not as important to the teacher as other agenda items that more closely aligned with the participants’ visions of teaching. Such a line of questioning confirms the potential of coaching to create spaces for communicative action that begins to resist top down agentive coercion. This is all to suggest that the potential for communicative action between a coach and a teacher, with consideration to the limitations espoused by Pennycook, is indeed a possibility.

Although it was informative to analyze the findings of this study using Habermas’ categories of constitutive interests, there were some difficulties. It appears that the neat boundaries between the practical, technical, and emancipatory are only bright in the theoretical work. Actually applying those categories to observations and interviews reveals that in reality, the lines are somewhat hazy. For example, Isabel’s desire to improve her classroom management contained both practical and technical interests. She wanted some routines and methods to improve behavior, but embedded in this technical interest is a practical interest in that she also wanted to improve the sociality of the class, particularly between herself and her students.

Although it may be recognized that Habermas can provide some broadening ways of thinking through professional learning, the professional learning itself will not fall neatly into his three categories. Indeed, imagining the success of creating a truly emancipatory space is difficult in itself. Considering if the successful creation of an emancipatory space also implies that the

classroom instruction would also align with the agreed-upon truths discussed makes the success of emancipatory spaces very difficult to estimate. As such, inklings and suggestions of emancipatory discussions may be small but suggestive of greater possibilities in their long-term development.

### **Vision of teaching**

There are several key points that this study can contribute to the current literature on visions of teaching. While working with the four participating teachers, it was evident that their initial descriptions of their vision of teaching were incomplete. Giving the teacher a few days to think after the first interview, then having a follow-up discussion with a visual representation created by the Wordle created an opportunity for a richer discussion about what the teacher really envisioned. Furthermore, as we engaged in the video-guided interviews, their visions continued to clarify and become more apparent. In the extant literature on vision of teaching, this growing in awareness of the vision has not been yet discussed. Researchers have asked about visions in an interview or in writing, but a time and a method for follow-up and development is something that this study can contribute.

Recognizing the inchoate nature of the participants' visions of teaching is also an important contribution. When first asked to talk about their vision, the original form was not only complete, but it could also be described as naïve. Without the observations of the visions in action (or in inaction) the teachers' vision was lacking in the grounding of working with real students in a complex environment. As such, as the teachers began to revisit and reflect upon their observations through the lens of their visions, their visions not only became more complete, but also more nuanced in their appreciation of the context and the reality of the classroom.

In addition to the development of vision, two essential characteristics of visions of teaching are observed in this study. These are that the visions of teaching are tied to the content area the teacher teaches as well as to the life stories of the teacher. Although such findings are not surprising and may be expected, the literature on visions of teaching has not explored the relationships between these complex variables.

Jon's reluctance to observe the disparity between his classroom instruction and his vision of teaching is an important recognition when thinking about using a teacher's vision of teaching to spark professional learning. For Islena, Nora, and Leah, talking about their vision of teaching created a space to critique their classrooms. However, for Jon, the vision of teaching simply matched what was happening already in his classroom. Although all the visions of teaching were observed to be somewhat reflexive with the classroom context, for a teacher who is less interested in changing and desirous to maintain authority and control in the classroom, exploring their vision of teaching is not sufficient for creating a highly reflective space for professional learning.

### **Implications for literacy coaching / professional learning**

In the policy forum pages of *Education Researcher* (2011) Barry and Bausmith state that they are concerned that professional development needs more emphasis on Shulman's (1987) pedagogical content knowledge. They suggest that professional development should be standardized and based on the core curriculum, or else there is no guarantee that teachers will engage sufficiently with pedagogical content knowledge. They were particularly concerned about this when teachers engaged in peer-led professional learning.

However, this study suggests that when a space is created where teachers can guide their own professional learning, they will address Shulman's pedagogical content knowledge. The

major emphases of the participating teachers included improving the students' reading of social studies content, deepening the connection between the students and their writing, strengthening the students' reading of informative texts, interpreting test score data, and effectively managing instructional time and pace are all certainly important aspects of instruction that Barry and Bausmith would likely regard as worthwhile professional development. In fact, considering the many ideas for study broached by the participants, pedagogical content knowledge was one of the teachers' major emphases. Indeed, this study provides evidence that when given the opportunity to make choices in a space characterized by communicative action, teachers can be relied upon to make good use of their time and energy. Islena, as a first year teacher, focused more on classroom management and routine than the other three participants, yet her observation that her content instruction was suffering because of management issues suggests a keen awareness of a logical next step in improving her classroom. Such evidence supports the idea that teachers are professionals who have the necessary judgment to inform their own growth.

As teachers may be relied upon to make good decisions about their professional learning, this should significantly change the roles of those who make decisions and implement professional development in the schools. This is not to say that there is not a role for such professionals, rather that role should be informed by the coaching literature, Mezirow's theories of adult learning, and trust in the professional judgment of teachers. Evidence from this study suggests that in the spaces that were marked as more formal professional development spaces, teachers focused on the more practical and technical aspects of teaching. Teachers certainly used those spaces well in addressing relevant aspects of their instruction, and a professional development administrator could make good use of such spaces in providing instruction on the latest research and work-shopping space for teachers to engage with the technical and practical.

Yet, if the goal is to also create a place for emancipatory interests, the professional developer should recognize that it must take place in less formal spaces. This means that if they professional developer wants to be part of such spaces, it would be necessary to spend much time with the teachers during lunch, between classes, during recess, and after school and in non-school settings. As such, an important aspect of a professional development role should be to encourage teachers to engage with each other in emancipatory ways and create such spaces in their own manner. Whether they could be legitimized by a professional developer who is an administrator remains to be seen.

This study also begins to fill a gap in the coaching literature. Although there have been many empirical studies that support the use of content coaching for changing instruction in very specific ways as seen in the literature review, there is little empirical support for the cognitive coaching. As such the findings of this study may be considered empirical support for coaching that fits more closely into the cognitive coaching strategies, emphasizing the need for teacher's to guide their own professional learning. This evidence suggests that teachers respond favorably and make well-reasoned choices when provided with the opportunity to work with a coach following a cognitive model. However, it also provides support that the coach may need to engage in some trial and error to find the most impactful fulcra to leverage with teachers.

One of the longstanding tensions in the coaching literature has been that while coaching models advocate the development of the teacher's professional abilities via honoring the teacher's agency in the classroom, coaches feel pressure to sometimes give counsel that was not asked for by the coached teacher (Dozier, 2006). In other words, the coach wants to tell the teacher what to do without the teacher's feedback. Starting with the teacher's vision, however gives a strong base that honors the principles of cognitive coaching while creating a space for

professional growth. This study provides evidence that the vision of teaching likely contains multiple fulcra that a coach might leverage while still maintaining the teacher's agency, thus ameliorating some of tension around the role of the coach.

Although all of the coaching literature has emphasized the need for the coach and the teacher to have a good relationship and open communication, and some literature has also emphasized the importance that the coach be part of the school community, one finding from this study can add to those imperatives. Much of my acceptance into the community of teachers seemed to come from being with the teachers at times that may not be part of the coaches' jobs. For example, eating lunch with the teachers and supervising recess time with the seventh grade teachers allowed me to get to know them better and let them get to know and accept me as a member of the community. In addition to that, spending many hours after school engaged in less formal conversations about schools, as well as meeting teachers in coffee shops to help with evaluating test scores and lesson planning brought acceptance into the community.

Equally important to being part of the community in this study is the nature of the teachers' talk in informal spaces. While the literature is replete with advice about how to talk and word your phrasing with teachers, less attention has been given to the informal spaces that enable conversations that extend beyond the practical and the technical. This is because in these informal spaces, teachers still talk about issues that are important to school, but they talk about them in a much more open way. In this study, I observed that it was in these informal spaces that the teachers talked about Habermas' emancipatory interests. It is within these spaces that the more radical and transformative discussions may be more likely to occur. Such are the conversations that may someday lead to Cummins vision of a reimagining and a realignment of the relationships between struggling students and their schools.



Indeed it should be noted that implementing a cognitive coaching model based upon Habermas and Mezirow is easily described in writing, the actual practice is much more complicated. The impositions of outside agendas, that truth-speaking is only an approximation rather than cannon, and the structural realities of the schooling environment suggest that truly following such a model is teleological in nature. This recognizes the Pennycook's critique as well as the messiness of working with people in a very human environment. In essence, the pure form of this model is very different from the enacted process of implementing the model that only approximates the pure form.

Although the coaching literature has a few suggestions for coaches who are working with reluctant teachers, Jon is a good example of the difficulties and limitations in coaching. Despite his presenting himself as open to coaching, Jon was less interested in grappling with the inconsistencies between his vision of teaching and his classroom instruction. Indeed, although on the surface he actively participated in the coaching experiences, there was a certain hesitancy to critique what was happening in his classroom. As informed by comments made by the participants, it is likely that Jon would not be the only teacher in this school who would be resistant to this form of professional learning. The participants felt lucky when they compared themselves to other grade-level teams of teachers who taught in a less supportive and less open community.

In many ways, Jon appeared to worry about losing control of his classroom. Even though his attitude was easy-going and his approach to students was friendly, this exterior belied a need for control in the classroom. As such, Jon was not ready to struggle with difficult questions and self-critiques about his own teaching. As Mezirow (1991) outlines in his description of transformative change, the moment of crisis is what sparked the urgency for addressing change.

For a teacher who does not feel that urgency or has not had that moment of crisis, a coaching model is likely not the best agent of professional learning and growth.

Evidence from this study does suggest however, that a cognitive coaching model that is informed by Habermas and Mezirow has potential as a mode of professional learning. Certainly there are many constraints and tensions that make its implementation difficult, yet many teachers may be relied upon to make good choices in negotiating their professional learning. Indeed, helping a teacher to focus on their vision for their classroom and then grounding that vision in the reality of their work created a space that yielded pertinent, appropriate, and fruitful professional learning.

### **Limitations**

Although the larger purpose of this study is to think about professional development that is transformative, sustainable, and meets the needs of teachers, this study is merely a beginning exploration of that topic. As the study does not meet the length of time necessary to truly address such topics as sustainability and transformation, it seeks only to examine the possibilities of the beginnings of a trajectory toward such ideals, particularly in the emphasis on helping teachers open up to an inquiry-based model of professional learning.

As with the brevity of the study, the small number of participants may also be critiqued. Exploring the experiences of four teachers may not be generalizable to the larger corps of teachers in American schools, but it can speak about the many of the experiences that teachers share across schools. These four teachers may not be representative of other teachers in that they were all fairly new to the profession. They were also very interested in furthering their professional skills and knowledge without recompense or licensure credit, providing the study as many as five extra hours a week. Certainly, many teachers are unable and unwilling to give so

much more time and effort on top of all the difficult work that they do. However, limiting the number of participants also provides the opportunity for this study to go deeper in its understandings of what it means to be a teacher in schools today.

This study design may also be critiqued in that the researcher is also an active participant in the study. I make no claims to removed objectivity, rather my views and experiences as a teacher, coach, and researcher inform the actions I will make in this study. As such, in the analysis, findings, and discussion sections of the study, it will be necessary for me to reflect on my own values and roles in my interactions with the participants. Indeed, everything from my privileged position at a premier university to my gender and my background experiences are an integral part of understanding the study's design and implementation as well as its analysis and findings. In short, there are no neutral players in this study.

### **Future Directions**

The findings of this study leave many unanswered questions. Although there were glimmers of emancipatory interests and transformative learning, engaging teachers in this approach to coaching over a number of years would yield clearer results and information about the potential of this approach. Indeed, a lengthening of time and a broader diversification of teachers would lend more credibility to the findings. The majority of the coaching and the interests of the teachers in this study focused on the students and their instruction. However, the participants also broached structural issues such as decisions about official curricula, formal professional development, and the role of teachers in the broader policy world of education. In order to address such ideas, a longer study would be helpful, as would purposeful planning.

Seeing as all of the participants were interested in being coached through some lesson planning, this may be an important element to consider in future trials. Beginning with the vision

of teaching, and then coaching teachers through questions about what their vision of teaching looks like as they plan lessons might be an interesting step before the video-guided interviews.

Another future direction this study could take might be an exploration of teacher characteristics and attributes that inhibit trying new things and taking risks. Teachers are reputed to be somewhat risk averse, but perhaps such an aversion is more malleable when approached with the help of a reflective and supportive coach. Perhaps this coaching model may be used to help teachers not only develop skills and gain knowledge, but to also pursue attributes which may bring the qualities that will have lasting and positive impacts on students who are sometimes not adequately served by current educational systems.

Finally, the evidence from this study suggests that different teachers will have varying responses to this method of coaching. Many teachers would likely be resistant to it. Further study would be helpful in addressing the needs and potential of working with reluctant teachers. More work in developing questioning techniques and supporting techniques as a reluctant teacher examines their vision and their instruction may yield the critical moment that moves them past their reluctance. Certainly it would be vital that they be supported through this process, and further research would be needed to inform this process.

## Appendix A

### Semi-structured Interviews with Teacher Participants

1. Describe a good day of teaching.
2. Tell me about how you decided to become a teacher.
3. What was your experience with school as a child?
4. What were your beliefs/convictions that led you to become a teacher?
5. What is it that you want your students to accomplish?
6. What is your vision of teaching?
7. Tell me about your teaching practices, what is a typical day like?
8. What is your particular gift to your students?
9. Do you see your teaching as a mission? How?
10. What is the most important thing you want your students to learn from you?
11. If you were to meet your students fifteen years from now, what do you hope they will tell you was the most important thing they learned from you?
12. What obstacles may prevent you from enacting your vision?
13. What are some ways you negotiate those constraints?
14. What have been significant influences on your instruction?
15. After your teacher preparation program, what kinds of professional development do you engage in?
16. What do you think of the formal professional development options available to you?
17. How do you make choices about your professional development trajectory?

## **Appendix B**

### **Semi-structured Interview Protocol for Administrators**

1. How do you think teachers learn to become better teachers?
2. What is your vision for professional development at Shafer Middle?
3. How do you decide which direction professional development should take?
4. How do you know when your professional development is working?
5. What kinds of professional development opportunities are available to teachers at Shafer Middle?
6. How well do you think your teachers engage in professional development?
7. How might you like to change professional development?
8. What obstacles stand in the way of your vision of professional development?

## **Appendix C**

### **Protocol for Planning for Video-recording**

Semi-structured interview with teacher participants

1. Why are you choosing this particular class to video record?
2. What do you hope to learn from the video?
3. What are your learning goals for the students in this lesson?
4. How will you know when the students have met those goals?
5. What will you be doing with your students in this lesson?
6. Where will be the best location to set up the video camera?

## **Appendix D**

### **Protocol for Video Guided Interview with Participant Teachers**

1. How do you feel the recorded class went?
2. What went well?
3. What would you have liked to have gone differently?
4. How well did the class meet your learning goals?
5. Having chosen clips from the video, how did you decide on which clips to discuss?

(Begin looking at the video clips as chosen by the teacher)

6. What do you notice in this clip?
7. What does this mean to your instruction?
8. I would like you to think about your vision for teaching. (Bring out the Wordle) How does what we saw in the video fit into your vision of teaching?



## Appendix E

### Protocol for the Coached Inquiry Projects: Semi-structured Planning

1. Over the past month we've talked a lot about instruction and your vision for teaching. Considering your vision of teaching and what you've observed and said about your instruction and your students, what kinds of things do you wonder about?
  - a. What is working in the classroom?
  - b. Are there things that aren't working for you or for your students? Tell me about them.
  - c. If you could change something in your classes or learn more about something, what would you like to focus on?
  - d. Is this something that you would like to focus on together?
2. How would you like to approach learning about ...?
3. How can I support you in learning/trying ...?
4. What do you think the end goal of ... would look like?

(At this point, we will begin to plan a short project around the teacher's desires for professional learning)

## **Appendix F**

### **Protocol for Final Interview**

1. At the beginning of this study, we talked about your vision of teaching. Has your vision of teaching shifted since that time? How?
2. Thinking back over this professional development experience, what experiences stand out? What would you change?
3. Has this experience addressed your needs as a teacher? How?
4. What moments in this experience pushed your critical thinking the most?
5. How did this professional development experience compare with other professional development experiences you've had?
6. What was the impact of discussing your vision of teaching on your professional practice?
7. What was the impact of the video-guided discussions on your professional practice?
8. What was the impact of the inquiry project on your professional practice?
9. How should a coach change the activities in this professional development experience if you were going to do it again?
10. Looking forward, how might this experience impact your future professional learning?

## Appendix G

### Reflection Rubric

Reflection rubric

	Levels			
	Routine Self-disengaged from change	Technical Instrumental response to specific situations without changing perspective	Dialogic Inquiry part of a process involving cycles of situated questions and action, consideration for others' perspectives, new insights	Transformative Fundamental questions and change
Focus (What is the focus of concerns about practice?)	Focus is on self-centered concerns (how does this affect me?) or on issues that do not involve a personal stake. Primary concerns may include control of students, time and workload, gaining recognition for personal success (including grades), avoiding blame for failure.	Focus is on specific teaching tasks such as planning and management, but does not consider connections between teaching issues. Uses assessment and observations to mark success or failure without evaluating specific qualities of student learning for formative purposes.	Focus is on students. Uses assessment and interactions with students to interpret how or in what ways students are learning in order to help them. Especially concerned with struggling students.	Focus is on personal involvement with fundamental pedagogical, ethical, moral, cultural, or historical concerns and how these impact students and others.
Inquiry (What is the process of inquiry?)	Questions about needed personal change are not asked or implied; often not acknowledging problems or blaming problems on others or limited time and resources. Critical questions and analysis are limited to critique of others. Analysis tends to be definitive and generalized.	Questions are asked by oneself about specific situations or are implied by frustration, unexpected results, exciting results, or analysis that indicates the issue is complex. Stops asking questions after initial problem is addressed.	Situated questions lead to new questions. Questions are asked with others, with open consideration of new ideas. Seeks the perspectives of students, peers, and others.	Long-term ongoing inquiry including engagement with model mentors, critical friends, critical texts, students, careful examination of critical incidents, and student learning. Asks hard questions that challenge personally held assumptions.
Change (How does inquiry change practice and perspective?)	Analysis of practice without personal response—as if analysis is done for its own sake or as if there is a distance between self and the situation.	Personally responds to a situation, but does not use the situation to change perspective.	Synthesizes situated inquiry to develop new insights about teaching or learners or about personal teaching strengths and weaknesses leading to improvement of practice.	A transformative reframing of perspective leading to fundamental change of practice.

Reprinted from Ward & McCotter (2004)

## Appendix H

### Method and Analysis Chart

Research Question	Data Sources	Data Analysis
On what aspects of professional practice do teachers focus when given the opportunity to design their own professional development?	Video-guided Interview transcriptions  Coached Inquiry Project transcriptions  Field Notes	Theory driven coding:  Habermas' constitutive knowledges
How does a teacher's vision of teaching align with their professional development choices?	Vision of Teaching Interview transcriptions  Video-guided Interview transcriptions  Coached Inquiry Project transcriptions  Field Notes	Open and Axial Coding  Constant Comparative
How do teachers describe their vision of teaching?	Vision of Teaching Interview transcriptions  Field Notes	
How does the instructional context (e.g. administrative expectations, policies, student needs, and parent	Administrative Interview transcriptions  Vision of Teaching Interview transcriptions	

<p>expectations) impact the enactment of the teachers' vision of teaching?</p>	<p>Video-guided Interview transcriptions Field Notes Coached Inquiry Project transcriptions</p>	
<p>How might a coach use a teacher's vision as a coaching tool?</p>	<p>Vision of Teaching Interview transcriptions Research Journal Field Notes</p>	
<p>How might a coach help a teacher to align their instruction with their educational vision?</p>	<p>Vision of Teaching Interview transcriptions Video-guided Interview transcriptions Coached Inquiry Project transcriptions Field Notes</p>	
<p>How might a coach use video guided interviews as a coaching tool?</p>	<p>Video-guided Interview transcriptions Research Journal Field Notes</p>	<p>Open Coding Constant Comparative</p>











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